

SISTER DEMOCRATS:  
THE ROLE OF WOMEN IN THE EARLY CHARTIST MOVEMENT, 1838-1848

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FOR MY HUSBAND, RICHARD

Whose love and acts of kindness made this possible.

ABSTRACT

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Chartism was a mass political movement undertaken by working-class men and women in Great Britain in the middle of the nineteenth century. The campaign and the name given to a participant, Chartist, is derived from the "People's Charter," a radical program which consisted of six points, the chief of which was universal manhood suffrage. In recent years a number of historians have presented new studies on different aspects of the Chartist movement. This thesis contributes to the growing number of thematic works on Chartism by examining the role of female members.

Since this study is an attempt to assess the nature of feminine involvement, it begins with an examination of the treatment given to this subject in existing historical literature. This review reveals the sparsity of information concerning women and their organizations, thus demonstrating the need for this thesis.

Two central questions underlie the several chapters which constitute the main body of this paper: What were the activities and aspirations of female Chartists? Did Chartism foster the emergence of working-class feminism?

The extent, scale, and nature of feminine participation was

largely influenced by regional considerations. The areas of the West Riding of Yorkshire, the East and West Midlands and South Lancashire in particular are dealt with in Chapters II, III, and IV. The first section concerns the coherent tradition of radicalism among women prior to the advent of the Chartist movement. This factor contributed to the rapid mobilization of widespread feminine support for Chartism in the north and the midlands in the initial phase of the campaign, 1838-1839, which is the focus of Chapter III. The continued involvement of female Chartists in certain localities in these regions during the periods of relative dormancy and of stormy upsurges in the 1840s is discussed in Chapter IV.

The subject of female radicals in London in 1838-1848, is treated in a separate unit because the character of metropolitan activity was so distinct. The reason for the apathy of London females in 1838-1839, is pointed out and special attention is given to two women, Susannah Inge and Mary Ann Walker, who defied conventional standards of behavior in the service of the Chartist cause.

This work closes with a re-emphasis of the significance of feminine involvement in Chartism. A comparison of the attitudes and aspirations of provincial and metropolitan females is also offered in an attempt to determine whether or not the goals of female Chartists were "feministic."

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## PREFACE

This study was suggested by a former graduate student, Michael Adams. While examining the Northern Star to develop his own thesis, "Conservative Aspects of the Chartist Press," he was impressed by the considerable coverage given in the Star to the activities of female Chartists and proposed the topic of the "image of women" in Chartism for a future paper. My interest in Victorian society and women's history led me to a bibliographical essay by S. Barbara Kanner in Suffer and Be Still. She posed the problem of whether the Chartist movement fostered the birth of working-class feminism.

During the course of my research, I encountered a collection of source readings on Victorian feminism, Free and Ennobled, in which the "emergence of feminism" was linked to the Chartist movement. Since S. Barbara Kanner and the editors of that book, Carol Bauer and Lawrence Ritt, dealt only with primary sources concerning changes in the social and political status of English women, I was influenced to likewise limit the scope of my study. To avoid generalizing beyond the experience of English female Chartists, I chose to exclude material about Scottish and Welsh women.

My interpretations of the role of working-class women in Chartism are largely based on information provided in the Northern Star. It furnished continuous coverage of the movement from 1837 to 1852 and numerous reports on the local activities of female radicals. There are, however, limitations and liabilities in utilizing the Northern Star as a primary source of information. In the early 1840s the alternate forms of

Chartism proposed by William Lovett and Henry Vincent were bitterly denounced in the Star by its owner, Feargus O'Connor. In consequence of O'Connor's hostility towards these rival campaigns, there is relatively little news about the National Association founded by Lovett and the Chartist temperance societies proposed by Henry Vincent. Thus it is difficult to determine the extent of feminine involvement in these two enterprises.

The fact that the fiery anti-Poor Law campaign and the overt appeal of Thomas Clutton Salt both fueled the initial emergence of feminine participation in Northern England influenced my decision to entitle Chapter III, "Kindling the Fire." The title of Chapter IV, "Keepers of the Flame," aptly summarizes the efforts to revitalize Chartism in 1840 and also the efforts of a few female associations to sustain Chartist activities into the mid-1840s. Since the feminine radicalism in the metropolis was of an inconstant and fitful nature, Chapter V is called "The Flicker in London."



## CHAPTER I

### INTRODUCTION

In the mid-nineteenth century the British laboring class felt beleaguered by a host of problems and bedeviled by a seemingly unsympathetic, if not repressive, government. The industrial revolution had wrought many economic and social changes in the lives of workers, to which they responded in various ways. Political action was one of the avenues taken by laborers who sought some control over wage rates and the pace of mechanization. In the campaign for extension of suffrage, 1830-1832, working-class agitators joined forces with middle-class radicals. The Parliamentary Reform Bill of 1832, of which much was expected, was a compromise measure which excluded workers from the conservative extension of the franchise.

Economic distress, particularly in the years of cyclical depression and unemployment between 1837 and 1843, compounded the laboring class's feeling of political frustration. Handloom weavers, framework knitters, and other craftsmen were being replaced in an increasingly mechanized system of production. Faced with declining income and growing dependency upon parish relief, craft laborers were among the many poor who were outraged over the passage of the Poor Law Amendment Act of 1834. Under this Benthamite system of relief no assistance was given able-bodied paupers except in grim workhouses. Working-class resistance to the harsh new poor laws was widespread and belligerent, but relatively ineffective. Without the right to vote, the lower class could bring little direct, political pressure to bear upon the Whig government.

With a growing sense of class consciousness, a numerous and articulate segment of the British laboring class aspired to enter the political mainstream and thereby to gain some control over the laws and policies affecting working-class institutions and family life. Political agitation resurged among working men and women and led to the rise of an independent, political movement with its own program and organization. The protest was called **Chartism** after its radical program, the "People's Charter," which demanded six points: universal manhood suffrage, equal electoral districts, the secret ballot, annually elected **Parliament**, removal of property qualifications for membership in the House of **Com-**mons, and the payment of Members of Parliament.

Workers reasoned that the establishment of a political democracy and the radical alteration of Parliament would lead to the reform of the Poor Law and provide a panacea for a wide spectrum of problems. Therefore, millions of lower class people were attracted to the Chartist banner, especially in times of great economic distress. This popular campaign spanned a twenty year period, which covered roughly those years between the enactment of the ~~New~~ Poor Law and the outbreak of the **Crimean** War. Despite its immediate failure, the Chartist movement was a political phenomenon of lasting significance. Several Charter points were eventually embodied in the British constitution. In terms of world history **Chartism** has the distinction of being the first mass political protest undertaken by working-class men and women.

The uniqueness, the magnitude, and the multifarious character of **Chartism** makes **it** a fascinating area of study. Yet as one historian lamented in 1973, "Despite the sudden relevance of mass movements, civil disobedience, popular riots, and forms of counterculture, the Chartist

movement remains one of the few sporadically plowed areas in the generally well-tilled field of British **history**."<sup>1</sup> Ten years later this assessment remains valid. Although a number of local and thematic studies of **Chartism** have appeared in recent years, there still are many topics which remain unexplored or which have received inadequate treatment by scholars. Falling in the latter category is the surprising lack of discussion about a certain element of the Chartist movement—working-class women. Although the participation of these "sister democrats," (as George Julian Harney called them), is documented in the radical literature, the subject has excited little attention among scholars.

To extend an understanding of Chartism, this thesis will examine the role of working-class women in the Chartist movement. An attempt will be made to determine the degree and character of feminine participation by raising several questions: What activities did female Chartists undertake? Were women given (or did they assume) any positions of leadership within local and national organizations? Did local or regional differences help to define or **limit** the nature of the role of the working-class women in Chartism? When were females predominantly visible in the early **Chartist** movement?

A major emphasis in this thesis will be analysis of the goals of female Chartists. The purpose here is twofold. The first is to discover whether or not the aims of female Chartists were "feministic." In a bibliographical essay which catalogued sources pertinent to the study of the social status of English women in the nineteenth century, S. Barbara Kanner suggests that female Chartists were proto-feminists. Kanner lists several Chartist sources, such as the English Chartist

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<sup>1</sup>Henry Weisser, "The Local History of Chartism—A Bibliographical Essay," The British Monitor III (Winter 1973): 18.

Circular and William Lovett's autobiography. She thinks that these sources "point in the direction of activities undertaken before the mid-century in behalf of and on the part of English women which aimed at feminine independence, greater sexual equality and participation in political programs." She concluded: "There may be value in reappraising English 'feminism' as an intellectual and social phenomenon that crossed over class lines."<sup>2</sup> This interpretation of Chartism as the breeding ground for the "emergence of feminism" is also found in Free and Ennobled: Source Readings in the Development of Victorian Feminism, edited by Carol Bauer and Lawrence Ritt. Included in this collection is an extract from the English Chartist Circular.<sup>3</sup> Are these authors correct in regarding female Chartists as early feminists or are their analyses actually misconstructions based upon an inadequate understanding of the position of women within the context of the whole movement? The second object is to note the variety of arguments brought forth by both sexes to justify the involvement of the "fair sex" in public matters.

Since Chartist intellectuals and writers perceived their movement as one stage of the continual, historical battle for human rights and happiness, it would be of value to ask what their viewpoint was concerning the rights of women. Were there male Chartists who thought that universal suffrage should include females? Who were the male leaders who encouraged women to become politically active? What were the attitudes of influential Chartists, like Feargus O'Connor, William Lovett, and

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<sup>2</sup>S. Barbara Kanner, "The Women of England in a Century Social Change, 1815-1914, Suffer and Be Still, ed., Martha Vincinus (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1976), p. 176.

<sup>3</sup>Carol Bauer and Lawrence Ritt., eds., Free and Ennobled: Source Readings in the Development of Victorian Feminism (Oxford, England: Pergamon Press, 1979), p. 56.

and Henry Vincent, towards female Chartists?

Since this study will attempt to reassess the part played by women in the Chartist movement, it is useful to review the existing historical literature concerning this topic. An embittered participant, R. G. Gammage wrote the first general narrative of the movement, History of the Chartist Movement: 1837-1854. Gammage can be credited with establishing two trends concerning women in the historiography of Chartism, which have survived over a century. First, as Edmund and Ruth Frow noted, like other chapters in the history of the industrial struggle, Chartism is "chronicled . . . in terms of men and their interests and activities. Women if mentioned at all, are given a passing reference and their role is relegated to the insignificant or, at best, supporting."<sup>4</sup> Gammage, for example, included and confirmed the testimony of familial suffering of a Preston handloom weaver, Richard Marsden, who appeared before fellow delegates at the Convention of 1839. Marsden's shocking revelation that his suckling infant drew blood rather than milk from the breasts of his starving mother, prompted Gammage to ask the following of his readers:

Is there any wonder that her husband, naturally a humane man, should be anxious to resort to any and every means, to put an end to a system conducted to such horrible results? The greater wonder is, that any man could be eye witness to such social atrocities without being stung by them to utter madness."<sup>5</sup>

Apparently Gammage thought that women were less sensitive to the motivating forces of hunger and misery. The second tradition established by him concerns his magnification of a trivial incentive for female Chartists

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<sup>4</sup>Edmund and Ruth Frow, "Women in the Early Radical and Labour Movement," Marxism Today, no. 12 (April 1968), p. 105.

<sup>5</sup>R. G. Gammage, History of the Chartist Movement, 1837-1854 (London: Truslove & Hanson, 1894; reprint ed., New York: Augustus M. Kelley, 1969), p. 108.

at the expense of a more significant one. In several passages, for instance, he stressed the idea that the patriotic fervor of females was aroused by their fascination with personal **qualities** of attractive young orators like Henry Vincent. According to Gamage: "With the fair sex [Vincent's] slight handsome figure, the merry twinkle of his eye, his incomparable mimicry, his passionate bursts of enthusiasm, the rich music of his voice, and, above all, his appeal for the elevation of woman, rendered him a universal favourite, and the Democrats of both sexes regarded him as the young Demosthenes of English Democracy."<sup>6</sup>

**Gamage's** emphasis on Vincent's charisma rather than his call for a better social position for women, has led subsequent historians to overlook this more vital source of motivation for female Chartists.

J. T. Ward noted that in the years following the demise of the movement, "British historians tended to write off **Chartism** as a proletarian failure, a temporary aberration from the Victorian saga of progress through the operation of liberal capitalism and self-help"<sup>7</sup> In the early twentieth century young scholars offered a new interpretation of the movement. Both Mark Hovell's The Chartist Movement and Julius West's A History of the Chartist Movement argue that **Chartism** was not a "lost cause." Their approach to the subject of female radicals, however, is hardly innovative. **Hovell** did not even acknowledge the existence of working-class agitators of the female gender. For West the issue of "woman's suffrage" within the context of the movement was merely one of the many divisive chords struck by various elements within **Chartism** in

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<sup>6</sup>Ibid., p. 11.

<sup>7</sup>J.T. Ward, Chartism (London: B. T. Bratsford Ltd., 1973), p. 7.

the winter of 1840-1841. Concerning the aspiration of women, West wrote: "Members of the various female political associations seem to have generally contented themselves with giving moral support to their male relatives, and, in some cases, assisting the families and dependents of imprisoned Chartists."<sup>8</sup> The myth of the passive, nurturing female was again employed.

Over half a century was to pass before another scholar would attempt a comprehensive study of the Chartist movement. Chartism by J. T. Ward provides an excellent analysis of the movement in relation to other protests of the mid-nineteenth century. Ward's aim to "re-examine Chartism as a whole," was not achieved because he disregarded the integral part played by women. Beyond his inclusion of the aforementioned quote from Gamage attesting to the popularity of Vincent and a passing reference to William Lovett's wife, Ward is disturbingly silent about female Chartists.

Although designed as a "pen portrait of Chartism," David Jones's Chartism and the Chartists demonstrates a greater awareness of female radicals than any previous work. An explanation for this fact can be found in the Preface where Jones acknowledges the help of Mrs. Dorothy Thompson and Mr. Reg Groves. Besides Edmund and Ruth Frow, Thompson and Groves are the only writers who have dealt with the subject of working-class women in Chartism. Although Jones's treatment of the role of working-class women is not extensive, it is accurate. He did note that there were a large number of female organizations in the early years of the Chartist movement and that the co-operation of women was

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<sup>8</sup>Julius West, A History of the Chartist Movement (London: Constable & Company Ltd., 1920: reprint ed., New York: Augustus M. Kelley, 1968), pp. 156-157.

especially important in times of economic distress.

The articles by Reg Groves and Edmund and Ruth Frow take the position that the modern labor movement is a direct derivation from Chartism. "Rebel Women In 1840 And To-Day," by Groves was published in a London-based labor periodical, The Worker, in 1930. In this piece Groves tries to prove that Victorian working women were confirmed militants in the great protest of the lower class. Since he does not document his article, his argument is less than persuasive. Groves, for example, expects his readers to accept that, "We find in 1842 a number of [female charter associations] passing resolutions demanding the vote for women, a demand supported by many Chartists leaders."<sup>9</sup> Where did he find such information? This sentence is the only material in his work which cannot be substantiated by an examination of the Chartist press.<sup>10</sup> Noting that female Chartists were not give an "equal part with men in the class struggle," Groves concludes the article with the assertion that in the labor movement of the 1930s "women and men are working side by side in all phases of the revolutionary movement."<sup>11</sup>

In "Women in the Early Radical and Labour Movement," which was published in Marxism Today, Edmund and Ruth Frow challenged the traditional

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<sup>9</sup>Reg Groves, "Rebel Women in 1840 and To-Day," The Worker (London), 7 November 1930, p. 7.

<sup>10</sup>Groves's three quotations from Chartist papers can be found in the Northern Star. For example, a declaration of the Birmingham Woman's Political Union that they would "brave all danger and defy all opposition for the acquirement of women's title to freedom," was published in the Star 6 July 1839, p. 8. His claim that in 1842 many female political associations demanded female suffrage, however, can not be substantiated in the journals available to me, the Northern Star, Chartist Circular (Glasgow), and the English Chartist Circular.

<sup>11</sup>Reg Groves, "Rebel Women," p. 7.



notion of women as "passive spectators of the struggles which characterised the early years of the industrial revolution."<sup>12</sup> Beginning with Mary Wollstonecroft and her book, the Vindication of the Rights of Women, the Frows trace the active involvement of women in radical politics. Peterloo, the Reform Bill of 1832, the free press agitation, trade unions, the factory movement, Owenite societies, and Chartism are all discussed in terms of women and their concerns and contributions. In addition to a short account of the participation of females in these movements, the Frows presented character sketches of prominent women. The names of Mrs. January Searle, Mary Ann Walker, and Helen MacFarlane are mentioned in connection with Chartism. The inclusion of the names of specific women represents a radical departure from all previous studies. The authors conclude that: "There is no doubt that women of the first industrial revolution played a part in the social movements which led to changes in their conditions of work and in their homes. Out of their experiences, the movement for equal suffrage developed and reached fruition." In true Marxian spirit the Frows remind readers that modern women will not achieve equality as a separate sex, but must fight along with men in the proletarian struggle against a capitalistic society.<sup>13</sup>

The most thorough research on the subject of female Chartists to date was carried out by Dorothy Thompson. In her essay, "Women and Nineteenth-Century Radical Politics: A Lost Dimension," Thompson interprets the Chartist movement as a culminating point of fifty years of working-class agitation and argues that women were highly active

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<sup>12</sup>Edmund and Ruth Frow, "Women," p. 105.

<sup>13</sup>Ibid., p. 112.

in political and industrial protests. Her examination of the role of female Chartists brought to light evidence that had never been utilized by other scholars writing in the English language. While Thompson did much to expand our knowledge of working-class women, she could not cover all aspects within the confines of an article.

The sparsity of secondary sources dealing specifically with the members of female political associations and charter unions, suggests that there is a definite need for further study. This study will help **fill** the gap which exists in Chartist literature, especially in the area of the aspirations and activities of these working-class female agitators.

Regrettably, there are limitations to this research. The invisibility of lower class women has often plagued the scholar. While not all female Chartists are inarticulate, faceless spirits to the modern historian, they are somewhat elusive. Except for the emergence of a handful of women, like Susannah Inge, Mary Ann Walker, and a Mrs. Lapsworth, the majority of these women have left little behind except their names on political addresses, subscription lists, and the land plan rolls. A general profile of female Chartists — their age, sex, and occupation—may be impossible to construct. Documents concerning such information may not have survived the years. To date, there has been no discovery of the minute books kept by most local charter associations.

**I**t is the availability of a large number of Chartist periodicals that makes this study possible. Although other primary documents, such as autobiographies, sermons, and pamphlets have been called into service, much of the information offered in this research paper was gleaned from newspapers of the mid-nineteenth century. The Northern Star stands out as the **single**, most important disseminator of Chartist news. Originally

based in Leeds, the Northern Star served to inform Chartists all over Great Britain concerning the events in various localities. Like the other journals, but to a far greater degree, the Star helped to give unity to the movement, to publicize the speeches of leaders, to focus upon common problems of the working class, and to impart political instruction. Equally important for this thesis, this radical organ carried numerous reports of local activities, published political addresses from associations and editorial letters, and supplied innumerable lists of subscriptions for a variety of causes. It is probable that in no place other than the Northern Star can this type of data be found in such a substantial quantity.

In order to facilitate the examination of the role of female Chartists and the issue of female suffrage, this study will look at these aspects within the context of the Chartist movement. The reasoning underlying such an approach is that the lives and actions of working-class women were affected more by class issues and institutions than by any notion of sexual oppression. To adopt a feminist interpretation, that is, of women as a group with distinct interests from men, in this case would be to obscure nineteenth-century reality beneath twentieth-century biases. Rather than distort the self-perception of female Chartists by applying an anachronistic concept of sisterhood, an effort will be made to view these radical women as they saw themselves and to let them voice their own concepts of feminism.

## CHAPTER II

### THE RADICAL TRADITION

In the years before the advent of Chartism, working-class women were visible and audible in a wide range of industrial and political organizations and campaigns. The feminine presence is especially evident in the tempestuous decades after Waterloo, when social and economic distress was acute. Immediate pressures, such as the impact of machines, were protested by both sexes. As a result of common experiences, working women with their brethren "came to feel an identity of interests as between themselves, and as against their rulers and employers."<sup>14</sup> Like men, women had assumed a radical stance and a class consciousness before the Chartist movement. The pre-existence of a coherent tradition of radicalism among females of the lower class can easily be established.

The status of females as workers was not a post-industrial phenomenon. Prior to the Industrial Revolution, women were already employed in every economic sector—industry, commerce, and agriculture. Industrialization, however, did produce profound changes for females employed in some basic industries, such as the manufacture of textiles. It created a wide-scale opportunity for working women in a new environment outside the home.<sup>15</sup> Within the factory system females as well as males were subjected to the demand for a tractable labor force. The

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<sup>14</sup>E. P. Thompson, The Making of the English Working Class (New York: Vintage Books, 1963), p. 11.

<sup>15</sup>Dorothy Thompson, "Women and Nineteenth-Century Radical Politics: A Lost Dimension," in Juliet Mitchell and Ann Oakley, The Rights and Wrongs of Women (Harmondsworth, England: Penguin Books Ltd., 1966), pp. 112-113.

capitalistic attack upon irregular, pre-mechanized work patterns, social customs, and habits was leveled against all mill hands. That a substantial portion of women shared this experience can be attested by the preponderance of females in British mills. In 1835, Dr. Andrew Ure noted in his The Philosophy Of Manufactures that of the total number of adult factory workers (over 18 years of age), there were 102,812 females as opposed to 88,859 males.<sup>16</sup> Thus, technological advances, such as the power loom, had a dual effect upon the employment of women. First, mechanization enabled mill owners to use unskilled feminine or juvenile laborers in place of adult male craftsmen. This in turn, resulted in a surplus of men skilled in outmoded techniques thrown into unemployment; therefore, many of their wives and daughters were forced into the factory system to help provide a family income.

In the first half of the nineteenth century "working-class radicalism combined traditional forms of action—mass demonstrations, processions, open political activities involving whole families and whole communities, together with early versions of the more sophisticated organizational forms which were to be the pattern of later nineteenth-century politics."<sup>17</sup> Since women comprised a large segment of the laboring class, it is certain that some of them participated in the various institutions and movements calculated to protect or foster the interests of laborers. They combined with members of their own sex or with working men, "to seek or avoid changes in their wages or working conditions, to

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<sup>16</sup>Wanda Neff, Victorian Working Women (London: Frank Cass and Company Limited, 1966), pp. 26-27.

<sup>17</sup>Dorothy Thompson, "Women and Nineteenth-Century Radical Politics," p. 113.

effect insurance against unemployment and other hazards, to bring pressure to bear upon Parliament or increase their representation there and for a great many other reasons."<sup>18</sup> That lower class women took part in a number of campaigns and associations prior to the beginning of the Chartist period can easily be demonstrated.

Contemporary accounts of outbreaks of spontaneous, direct action which erupted in response to the distressed state of a trade, grain prices, or other specific grievances, often obscured the presence of women under generic labels—people, spinners, and weavers." Upon occasion, particularly when females initiated and carried out the acts of disorder, their activities were recorded. In Letters from England R. Southey related the violent reaction of Worcester female glovemakers who were thrown out of work when leather gloves became unfashionable.

[Whereas], men commonly complain[ed] and submit[ted]; the women] were more disposed to be mutinous. [At Worcester] it [became] dangerous [for genteel females] to appear in silken gloves in the streets. For one lady who foolishly or ignorantly ventured to walk abroad [t]here in this forbidden fashion, is said to have been seized by the women and whipped.<sup>20</sup>

Working-class associations known as friendly societies, benefit societies, or box clubs stressed self-reliance and self-restraint. Since these organizations sought to provide sickness and burial funds from a collective resource, membership and eligibility for payments were strictly regulated. The Birmingham Society, for example, excluded females over the age of 40 from enrollment and refused benefits to any member suffering from "the venereal disease or any other disease contracted or

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<sup>18</sup>E. H. Hunt, British Labour History 1815-1914 (Atlantic Highlands, N. J. : Humanities Press, 1981), p. 191.

<sup>19</sup>Shelia Lewenhak, Women and Trade Unions (New York: St. Martin's Press, 1977), p. 12.

<sup>20</sup>Dorothy Thompson, "Women and Radical Politics," p. 117.

occasioned by a loose vicious life . . . .<sup>21</sup> In addition to the friendly societies exclusively for women, there were female lodges of many male associations, such as the Foresters, Druids, Gardeners, Rechabites, Oddfellows, and others.<sup>22</sup> Benefit societies furnished women of the lower class with experience in founding and administering organizations.

Following the end of the Napoleonic Wars, popular radicalism was fanned by William Cobbett in his Political Register and by Henry Hunt in his speeches. Both men attributed the current hard times to governmental corruption and asserted that pre-industrial values could be restored through democratic suffrage. In 1818 and 1819, men and women of the laboring class established reform societies, took part in mass demonstrations, and petitioned Parliament in favor of reform.<sup>23</sup> Male agitators apparently encouraged females to participate in the movement on a somewhat equal standing. The practice of women voting on resolutions at radical meetings was supposedly initiated by a Lancashire leader, Samuel Bamford, whose insistence upon the propriety of and the right of females to vote met with unanimous approval.<sup>24</sup>

At a meeting in Blackburn on 5 July 1819, the audience was well-disposed towards the local female reform society. When the spokeswoman, Alice Kitchen, presented the hustling chairman, John Knight, with a Cap of Liberty made of scarlet silk, the crowd shouted not only — "Liberty

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<sup>21</sup> Sheila Lewenhak, Women and Trade Unions, pp. 18-22.

<sup>22</sup> Wanda Neff, Victorian Working Women, p. 35.

<sup>23</sup> David Harris Willson, A History of England (New York: Holt, Rinehart and Winston, Inc., 1967), p. 623.—

<sup>24</sup> Samuel Bamford, Passages In The Life Of A Radical, 6th ed., edited by W. H. Chaloner (London: Frank Cass and Company Limited, 1967), p. 165.

or Death," but also "God bless the women!" The pervasive sense of class identification among women and men is further demonstrated by the address of the Blackburn Female Reform Society:

Having shared with you, our fathers, our husbands, our brothers, our relatives, and our friends, in the overwhelming misery of our country, . . . we come forward with avowed determination, of instilling into the minds of [our] offspring a deep rooted abhorrence of tryanny . . . We cannot boast much of female courage, . . . but we do assure, that had *it* not been for the golden prize of reform held out to us, we should long ere this have sallied forth to demand our rights . . .<sup>25</sup> to have obtained . . . food and raiment for our children.

Members of female political unions were among the throng of some 60,000 persons gathered at St. Peter's Field on 16 August 1819 to hear the speech of Henry Hunt. Female reformers from Oldham, Royton, and Manchester carried banners and escorted musical bands in the procession. When the massive demonstration was brutally disrupted by authorities, "white vested maids . . . were among those indiscriminately sabred or trampled . . ." by the cavalry.<sup>26</sup> The "Peterloo Massacre" became a lasting symbol of oppression. Ethelinda Wilson, for example, challenged fellow female radicals to make certain that the story of Peterloo did not "descend to posterity unaccompanied by proofs that [*it*] operated . . . as a stimulus to the exertions of the oppressed."<sup>27</sup>

In the campaign against newspaper taxes during the 1820s and 1830s both sexes undertook the risk of printing and hawking illegal unstamped journals. During Richard Carlile's terms of imprisonment, his London news shop and the publication of his radical organ, The Republican, were supervised first by his wife, Jane, and later by his sister, Mary Ann.

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<sup>25</sup>Black Dwarf (London), 14 July 1819 (Westport, Connecticut: Greenwood Reprint Corporation, 1970), pp. 453-455.

<sup>26</sup>Samuel Bamford, Passages In The Life Of A Radical, p. 207.

<sup>27</sup>Republican (London), 21 January 1820, (Westport, Connecticut: Greenwood Reprint Corporation, 1970), pp. 71-72.



For their "seditious" behavior both women were confined to the Dorchester Gaol. In a public address the Female Republicans of Manchester expressed their admiration of and sympathy for their "sisters in the cause of Liberty." They also forwarded a small sum of money to the expectant Mrs. Carlile, so that she could provide some measure of comfort for the soon-to-be-born infant.<sup>28</sup>

The Carlile family is one of the many examples of radical households, where male and female relatives co-operated to promote popular causes. Throughout the industrial regions there existed a number of radical families who provided a generational link in terms of radical tradition, values, and folklore. The influence of relatives, especially the female ones, was noted in several of the Chartist memoirs written in the late nineteenth century. In 1887, Benjamin Wilson, a Halifax Chartist, recalled his exposure to radical principles and practices as a youth in Skircoat Green. "The Women of this village were not far behind the men in their love of liberty, for I have heard my mother tell of their having regular meetings and lectures at the house of Thomas Washing, a shoemaker . . . and they too went into mourning [at the time of Peterloo] and marched in procession, Tommy's wife carrying a cap of liberty on the top of a pole."<sup>29</sup>

In the years between 1834 and 1838, there was a continuous involvement of working-class women throughout the wide spectrum of popular radicalism. Females were active in the Ten Hour campaign, the Grand National Consolidated Trades' Union, and the anti-Poor Law movement. In

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<sup>28</sup>Ibid., 11 January 1822, pp. 589-592.

<sup>29</sup>Benjamin Wilson, The Struggles of an Old Chartist (Halifax, England: n.p., 1887), quoted in Dorothy Thompson, "Women and Nineteenth-Century Radical Politics," pp. 119-120.

the northern manufacturing districts where resistance to the revised system of relief was widespread, there was a revival of female associations. At Elland in West Riding the women held public discussions on the New Poor Law. For her attack upon the bad arrangement of society and the competition of machines with manual labor, Elizabeth Hanson, a member of the Elland Female Radical Society, was criticized in the Globe. Hanson ably refuted her critic's claim that she was intellectually unfit to master the principles of political economy.<sup>30</sup>

When the "People's Charter" was circulated throughout Great Britain in 1838, it gained a strong following in the industrial districts such as the West Riding of Yorkshire and South Lancashire. In these areas there was a pre-existing tradition of industrial and political action among men and women. The mushrooming of female political unions in the early Chartist movement can be partially attributed to economic distress and the mobilization of a coherent tradition of radicalism among females.

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<sup>30</sup>Northern Star and Leeds General Advertiser, 21 April 1838, (London: British Museum Microfilm Service, 197?), p. 7.

## CHAPTER THREE

### KINDLING THE FIRE, 1838-1839

In most Chartist strongholds, such as the West Riding of Yorkshire, South Lancashire, and the East and West Midlands, British working-class women were visible and active members of female organizations in the peak periods of Chartism, 1838-1839 and 1841-1842. Feminine involvement is also discernable in the Chartist Land Scheme, 1845-1848. The part females played in the Chartist revival of 1848 is not readily apparent beyond the fact that one female association was mentioned in the Northern Star on 29 April 1848. With the exception of sections of Northumberland and Durham County, feminine radicalism outside these centers was generally sporadic, **if** existent at all.<sup>31</sup>

The nature and extent of the role of working-class women was largely shaped by local tradition, economic and social conditions, local leadership or the impact of Chartist "missionaries." In the Northern textile districts, for example, there was a history of working-class radicalism on the part of both sexes. During the anti-Poor Law agitation a number of female radical associations were revived or established.

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<sup>31</sup> Another center of Chartist activity, London, will be discussed in Chapter Five. The strongholds of Wales and Scotland lie outside the bounds of this study. For some indication of the role of Scottish women in Chartism see Alex Wilson, The Chartist Movement in Scotland (Manchester University Press, 1970); Northern Star, 29 June 1839, p. 7; 16 November 1839, p. 3; 7 November 1840, p. 1. Passing reference to Welsh female Chartists appears in David Williams, John Frost: A Study in Chartism (Cardiff: University of Wales Press, 1939). See also Northern Star, 28 December 1839, p. 5; 15 May 1841, p. 8.

When Chartism became the dominant vehicle of radical expression in 1839, many women came to support it as a natural extension of pre-existing protests. But a more important source of stimulus to the founding of female associations came from male Chartists like Thomas Clutton Salt, who overtly urged women to become politically involved.

The bitter industrial experience, a deepening trade depression in 1837, and the introduction of the new Poor Law unions and commissioners into Northern England fueled the anti-Poor Law campaign led by Joseph Rayner Stephens and the factory reform movement of Richard Oastler. Due to the careful maneuvering of an Irish radical, Feargus O'Connor, the beginning of Chartism was closely linked to these protests. By associating himself with these reform movements, O'Connor sought to increase his popularity and political influence in South Lancashire and in the West Riding of Yorkshire. During 1837 and 1838, he mounted the platform at various meetings with Oastler and Stephens to denounce the evil effects of the Benthamite system of relief and of the factory system. Following the emergence of a constitutional campaign in May 1838, which was founded upon the "People's Charter" of the London Working Man's Association and the petition put forward by the Birmingham Political Union, O'Connor began to pursue a new tactic. He sought to convert the mammoth following of Oastler and Stephens to the alternate solution of Chartism by arguing that universal suffrage was a comprehensive panacea for all social and economic ills. Political rights for adult males would supposedly enable the working class to repeal oppressive class legislation and to alter economic relationships.

Although Feargus O'Connor never actively or openly encouraged women to enter the political arena, his strategy drew females and female

associations into the Chartist movement. Women like Mary Grassby of Elland, who organized several female public meetings to condemn the Poor Law and factory systems in the early months of 1838, came to accept O'Connor's argument. Thus, in July 1839, Mrs. Grassby could be found lecturing to the Hull Female Patriotic Society on the effects of the Poor Law of 1834, the suffering of factory children in Elland, and on the need for women of Hull to "do their duty" by endorsing the Charter and the National Convention.<sup>32</sup>

The first open appeal to females to participate in the Chartist movement came from a council member of the Birmingham Political Union, Thomas Clutton Salt, a lamp maker who owned a small business. In 1837, the BPU, which had played a leading role in the political Reform movement of 1830-1832, was revived. Under the guidance of Thomas Attwood, a Member of Parliament for Birmingham, the BPU advocated currency reform and Parliamentary reform by the means of peaceful and lawful agitation through a nationwide petition. Since the Birmingham document embodied historic radical demands, such as universal suffrage, short-term Parliaments, and the secret ballot, it was possible for the men of Birmingham to secure a tenuous alliance with reformers from London, Glasgow, Manchester, and Leeds. For example, the way to co-operation between the London Working Man's Association and the Birmingham Political Union was paved by the BPU's adoption of the LWMA's "People's Charter." In the spring of 1838 the Birmingham organization also took the initiative of devising strategies to compel Parliament to accept the "six points"

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<sup>32</sup>Northern Star and Leeds General Advertiser, 13 July 1839 (London: British Museum Microfilm Service, 197?), p. 5.

and of instituting a national petition, a delegate conference, and the collection of a "national rent."<sup>33</sup>

As a council member T. C. Salt had proposed a plan for the working class to exert pressure on the government by abstaining from the consumption of taxable goods, such as tea. Although his project never received official blessing from the BPU, Salt set about implementing his scheme. He convened a large public meeting of chief purchasers of tea and other taxable goods--women. According to Salt, "a more beautiful and moving sight was never seen," than when an estimated 12,000 females assembled in a rented hall on 2 April 1838. There the women "resolved religiously . . . that their children's children should not be trampled upon as they had been" and pledged their support to the BPU. In a letter to Mr. Ebeneter Elliot of Sheffield, Salt boasted: "■ alone of Birmingham reformers dared to convene or attend **it**." Since Salt's public meeting of females was a "triumphant experience," he announced his intention to call similar meetings "throughout England" and to have a separate petition "signed by millions of women." Concerning his advocacy of feminine involvement Salt said: "■ believe (I might say ■ know,) that hitherto, the women have thought so little on politics, and being so utterly ignorant of the connection of our system with their poverty and degradation, that they have either not interfered, or persuaded their husbands from meddling with politics as a thing of no profit." Perhaps his warning that "We cannot afford their neutrality or hostility; they must be our enthusiastic friends" was directed at his

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<sup>33</sup>The expense of lodging provincial delegates at London for the Convention was to be undertaken by constituents of the electing localities. This subscription was called "national rent."

fellow council members and Attwood.<sup>34</sup> Despite the outpouring of criticism and reluctance of his colleagues to give their approval of his boycott scheme, Salt continued to urge women to "meddle in politics."

In co-operation with the London Working Man's Association and the leading reformers of Glasgow, a national campaign in favor of the Charter was launched on Glasgow Green on 21 May. The great demonstration at Glasgow was to be the first in a series of meetings on a grand scale to be held in Birmingham, Manchester, Liverpool, and the West Riding during the summer of 1838. The great Birmingham rally was set for 6 August on the waste grounds of Holloway Head. When the results of efforts to expand the political union's membership and to arouse the surrounding localities fell below expectations, the BPU extended its search for supporters to new fields. Five days before the demonstration T. Clutton Salt called a second public meeting of Birmingham women to encourage their participation at the rally. His suggestion that they form their own political union was greeted with much enthusiasm.<sup>35</sup>

With the support of the BPU membership, the trades, and the females, the muster at Holloway Head was considerable enough for the Northern Star and the Birmingham Journal to boast a crowd of 250,000 to 300,000 people and for the local conservative newspapers to concede an estimation on 10,000 to 20,000.<sup>36</sup> According to Henry Vincent, a young orator in the service of the London Working Man's Association, "there were full 50,000 women, all neatly and cleanly attired" at the outdoor demonstration.<sup>37</sup>

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<sup>34</sup>Northern Star, 5 May 1838, p. 3; Carlos Flick, The Birmingham Political Union (Hamden, Connecticut: Archon Books, 1978), p. 134.

<sup>35</sup>Carlos Flick, Birmingham Political Union, p. 148.

<sup>36</sup>Ibid., p. 150.

<sup>37</sup>Dorothy Thompson, "Women and Nineteenth-Century Politics," p. 124.

Vincent was only the speaker to address the fair sex on that occasion. The Northern Star reported his sentiments:

The women of England were with them. Was it not important to have the women with them? (Hear, hear.) And was it not important to the women themselves, that the men should succeed in the object they had in view; for under a despotism, a woman became debased and degraded, while under a system of freedom, she was treated as she deserved to be—as an intelligent being fit to give instruction and proper direction to the youthful mind.<sup>38</sup>

Along with Salt, Vincent was one of the first exponents to recognize the potential contribution of women in terms of boycotting of goods, obtaining the projected goal of "millions" of signatures on the petition, swelling the rank and file to impressive magnitude, and exerting influence upon male relatives.

Less than two weeks after the Birmingham affair, Salt published an address, To The Women of Birmingham, in which he put forth a more detailed defense of, and argument for, feminine participation in public matters. He informed that:

The dull in intellect, the cold in heart, will sneeringly enquire—why do women leave their domestic occupations?—wherefore are women made to meddle into politics?

Let this be your reply:—

The idle . . . have dragged the wife from the home, the child from its sport, to break down the wages of the husband and father . . . They made laws to make us poor, and made poor-laws to deprive us of relief. Therefore do the people gather and therefore do the women leave their homes to attend political meetings.

The men of Birmingham have set a noble example to the country. The women of Birmingham shall set a still more unrivaled one.<sup>39</sup>

Salt's address provided the cornerstone for the Birmingham Woman's Political Union, the first female organization formed for the

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<sup>38</sup>Northern Star, 18 August 1838, p. 8.

<sup>39</sup>Northern Star, 25 August 1838, p. 8.



purpose of advancing the Chartist cause. On 29 August, T. Clutton Salt and John Collins, a BPU council member, spoke before a meeting of 1300 women. It is evident that Salt's leaflet had made some females aware that as members of the working class, they shared the same grievances as male relatives. An unidentified woman came before the group to reveal how she had used Salt's line of reasoning to defend her political activity against the "violent attacks" of some "Tory acquaintances." "She would not have . . . [become involved in political concerns], had she not suffered by politics; and had she not found that, by leaving politics entirely to men, her condition, and that of her neighbours, was getting worse." Following this testimony, a committee of women was formed to oversee the distribution of Salt's address, and arrangements were made for another meeting. By the next week, the BWPJ had collected £10 to donate for the financial support of Birmingham delegates to the National Convention. Collins claimed that this was the "first money" to be given as "national rent."<sup>40</sup>

Salt's successful recruitment of women at Birmingham encouraged others to appeal to females to take part in Chartism. A front-page announcement of "A Great Radical Demonstration," which was to take place on Kersal Moor on 24 September contained a special request of the females:

Women of Manchester and Surrounding Districts!—Recollect! that on your exertions depend the success of this glorious enterprise. You are called upon to exert your influence in the cause of Universal Freedom, for on that depends the happiness of you and your families. Rally round the standard of Liberty upon the heights of Kersal Moor.

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<sup>40</sup>Northern Star, 1 September 1838, p. 6; 15 September 1838, p. 8; see also Carlos Flick, Birmingham Political Union, p. 193, note 2. Salt's address, which appears in the Northern Star, was also printed in leaflet form for distribution. This leaflet can be found in the Birmingham Reference Library.

This appeal to womanhood, which was based on restoration of domestic tranquility, was effective. At the demonstration "there were many thousands of females assembled," who were exhorted by J. R. Stephens to join with males to provide "leverage . . . to move all the monsters of oppression and opposition."<sup>41</sup>

As the year 1838 drew to a close the ascendancy of the Birmingham Political Union and its pursuit of peaceful and legal modes of agitation were gradually being eclipsed by Feargus O'Connor and other advocates of physical force. In an effort to curb O'Connor's militant language, T. C. Salt entered into a public debate with the Irishman on 28 October. By insisting that he never invoked anything more than the latent force behind public opinion, O'Connor won over the women and men of Birmingham. As a result of the negative publicity given the incident, Salt's reputation was greatly tarnished. Even the Nottingham Female Political Union, which had been formed under the direction and encouragement of Thomas Salt, passed a resolution condemning his rash and aspersive assault on Feargus O'Connor.<sup>42</sup>

The General Convention of the Industrious Classes met in London on 4 February, 1839. The delegates had assembled to organize the national petition, to prepare for its presentation to the House of Commons, and to arrange for the later introduction of the "People's Charter." They also planned, in consequence of either the petition or the Charter being rejected, to initiate the use of one or more "ulterior measures" to compel the legislature to enact their demands. When the actual number of

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<sup>41</sup>Northern Star, 22 September 1838, p. 1; 29 September 1838, p. 3.

<sup>42</sup>Carlos Flick, Birmingham Political Union, pp. 160-166; Northern Star, 19 January 1839, p. 3.

signatures and the total of the "national rent" were calculated, both were found to be significantly lower than the projected goals. The Convention, which was supposedly called into existence by the overwhelming support of the working class, had to face the fact that further agitation was necessary. The assembly decided to postpone the presentation of the petition, to conduct agitation in London, and to send "missionaries" into the provinces to hold meetings and collect more signatures and money,

Since the Birmingham moral campaign was an obvious failure, Thomas C. Salt felt compelled to withdraw from the Convention. On 18 February he appeared before the Birmingham Woman's Political Union to express his defeatist view and to justify his withdrawal from the London Convention with personal reasons. As both the Convention and the Birmingham Political Union came increasingly under the control of "physical force" men, moderates like Salt who expressed timidity or doubt were looked upon as traitors. The extent of Salt's fall from grace can be evidenced by the scorn of former friends. An announcement that Salt would address the next meeting of the BWPJ was greeted with loud objections from the members. Mrs. Lapsworth, a founding member and the association's president, was more disposed to be charitable. It was reported that she said that he "was a good, but weak and timid man, . . . and still entitled to their respect and compassion." Thus, Salt's career as a Chartist and an organizer of radical females came to an ineffectual conclusion.<sup>43</sup>

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<sup>43</sup>See Carlos Flick, Birmingham Political Union, pp. 168-174 for a discussion of Salt's role as a delegate; Northern Star, 1 June 1839,

In May the "rump" Convention moved from London to Birmingham where local backing was stronger. From there it issued the "Manifesto" which asked followers to consider eight forms of "ulterior measure," such as to trade only with Chartists and to strike for a "sacred month." On 16 May it voted to temporarily adjourn until 1 July, so that delegates could mobilize support in their localities and present the "Manifesto."

The Chartist movement in the period of 1838-1839 was distinguished by the fact that its organization was purely on a local level and agitating bodies were united only through the petition campaign. The political and financial support of all associations, male and female, therefore, was a vital concern. Thus, female political unions and radical associations were given the same opportunity for publicity as male societies in the Northern Star. For purposes of propaganda it was also important to note all local activity as a demonstration of the widespread adherence to Chartist principles. As a result the activities of women were widely reported so that it possible to identify some of the motivation behind the participation of females.

The extensive coverage given the Birmingham Woman's Political Union in the Northern Star helped to stimulate feminine involvement in other parts of the kingdom and led to the formation of other women's organizations. In the early days of February the Star carried the addresses of two new associations, the Female Political Union of Newcastle-upon-Tyne and the Ashton Female Political Union. There was a common thread of grievances of working-class women which was expressed in both pieces and also a bitterness, because their role as wife and mother was constantly being undermined by outside influences. The Northumberland and

group best articulates this feeling and their reasons for coming forward in favor of Chartism:

We have seen that because the husband's earnings could not support his family, his wife has been compelled to leave her home neglected and, with her infant children, work at soul and body degrading toil . . . For years we have struggled to maintain our homes in comfort, such as our hearts told us should greet our husbands after fatiguing labor. Year after year has passed away, and even now our wishes have no prospect of being realised, our husbands are over wrought, our families ill-fed and our children uneducated—the fear of want hangs over our head.

Both female associations pointed to bad government and oppressive class legislation as the cause of their poverty. In particular they expressed a deep hatred of the Poor Law. **It** was a law enacted to "treat poverty as a crime, to deny misery consolation, to take from the unfortunate their freedom, to drive the poor from their homes and fatherland, to separate those whom God has joined together, and tear the children from their parents [sic] care." These Northern women had accepted Feargus O'Connor's argument that amelioration of their grim condition could be obtained through the enactment of the Charter as law. They urged their "sisters" throughout Great Britain to work for the Charter, to back the Convention, and to encourage and co-operate with male relatives in obtaining the "six points."

Even though these two groups of females shared many areas of agreement, there were some differences of opinion. The Female Political Union of Newcastle-upon-Tyne, for example, was willing to "call upon all persons to assist them in this good work, . . . especially shopkeepers which [sic] the Reform Bill enfranchised." The attitude of the women from Ashton-under-Lyne reflects the more belligerent tone of the Lancashire Chartists and their rejection of co-operation between the **laboring class and middle class. These females gave assurances "that they hated bloodshed and strife, that our souls revolt at the bare idea of**

civil war— . . . [but cautioned] that [those] who would work us and skilly us to death, deserve no mercy at our hands; the Scriptures say, 'Tis better to be slain by the sword than to die with hunger.'" The women of Ashton also put forth the belief that once universal suffrage was obtained voting privileges for females would follow. This was a rare instance in which female Chartists outside of London and its metropolitan influence expressed a desire for, or an expectation of, female suffrage. In general, females like those of Newcastle said nothing on the subject or else spoke in vague terms like the radical women of Rochdale, who were "determined publicly to show the world that they know their rights and will maintain them." It would seem that women in the West Riding of Yorkshire, South Lancashire, and the East and West Midlands were motivated more by the optimism that Chartism could bring about a better life, than by the promise of a share in political power.<sup>44</sup>

During the course of 1839, a number of subscriptions were undertaken for various causes, such as defense funds for political prisoners and "national rent." In this activity females played an important role. For example, most of the work of canvassing neighborhoods in Birmingham fell upon the female political union. Elizabeth Pendleton and the females of the Pollard-street Union were such energetic collectors that the Manchester council gave them a special vote of thanks. When a defense fund was established to defray the trial expenses of Joseph Rayner Stephens, women all over Great Britain responded to his need.

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<sup>44</sup> Northern Star, 9 February 1839, p. 6; 2 February 1839, p. 3; 13 April 1839, p. 5. See also, Dorothy Thompson, "Women and Nineteenth-Century Radical Politics," p. 123 and "Address of Female Political Union of Newcastle-upon-Tyne to their Fellow Countrywomen," in Dorothy Thompson, The Early Chartists (Columbia, South Carolina: University Press of South Carolina, 1971), pp. 128-134. Skilly was a sour porridge, which was served at Poor Law Unions, thus it represented unpalatable food.

The Female Radicals of Reform Street in Bradford done raised over hl, and pledged themselves to fight **if** he were imprisoned.<sup>45</sup> Like men, the women usually raised small sums, yet every contribution was important. The total "national rent" of £1,700 and the almost £2,000 amassed for the Stephens Defense Fund was the aggregate sum of the "mite" of many.<sup>46</sup>

After the Birmingham Convention was adjourned, delegates and local leaders launched a summer campaign of demonstrations and meetings to marshal a more aggressive showing of support. The most extensive drive for female membership was conducted in the Northeast under the auspices of the Durham County Charter Association. The first female public meeting in that county was held in Sunderland and drew a crowd of several hundred women. There George Binns, who was, along with young James Williams, a dominant figure in Durham politics, lectured on "exclusive dealing," i.e., to trade only with other Chartist or with those sympathetic to the cause. James Batchelor's invitation to the females to form a Chartist organization was readily put into action by the women. The Sunderland Female Charter Association was established and a committee of six women was chosen to further organize the females of Sunderland. Chartist "missionaries," James Williams and William Redhead, were personally responsible for establishing similar associations in nearby Thornley, Quarrington Hill and Kelloc. By the late

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<sup>45</sup> Carlos Flick, Birmingham Political Union, p. 166; Northern Star, 30 March 1839, p. 6; 6 April 1839, p. 4; 20 April 1839, p. 5; 9 March 1839, p. 1.

<sup>46</sup> J. T. Ward, Chartism, p. 114; Julius West, A History of the Chartist Movement, p. 127.

summer two more neighboring localities had female Chartist societies, Darlington and Tewkesbury.<sup>47</sup>

Of the eight ultimate sanctions proposed in the "Manifesto" exclusive dealing was the one form of working-class pressure in which the co-operation of women was a decisive factor. The recently enfranchised shopkeepers and publicans, whose places of business were located within the working-class district, were vulnerable to this tactic. The success of this strategy in Bradford was attested to by a smug notice in the Northern Star that: "Whig clothes-dealers in this town appear rather chop-fallen." Sometimes the idea of exclusive dealing was given a humorous twist. For example, George Harney, a member of the East London Democratic Association, advised the maidens of Newcastle to "have no other sweethearts but good Democrats, and soon the young men would be upvarious Democrats." Nonetheless, working-class women could bring to bear considerable influence upon the way middle-class businessmen voted at the open hustings and on how much they contributed to Chartists subscriptions.<sup>48</sup>

Another form of "ulterior measures," the arming and drilling in preparation of a general strike, proved to be a less effective tactic. It brought about government repression and a growing number of arrests of Chartists throughout the year of 1839. The menacing stance assumed by many local Chartist bodies in the provinces, especially in the North, was reported to the Home Office by apprehensive magistrates and other

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<sup>47</sup>Northern Star, 6 June 1839, p. 7; 29 June 1839, p. 6; 13 July 1839, p. 3; and 3 August 1839, p. 7.

<sup>48</sup>Northern Star, 26 January 1839, p. 5; 22 June 1839, p. 3; see also, Dorothy Thompson, "Women and Nineteenth-Century Radical Politics," pp. 126-127.



concerned observers. James Partington of West Houghton in Lancashire, for example, had informed the government that on Monday, 1 April: "a great number of men, women, boys, and girls, armed with pikes, some with swords, pistols, firelocks with fixed bayonets [had marched into the center of town amidst a fanfare of music and a flourish of] five very splendid flags, Caps of Liberty, Death with Cross Bones, mounted upon poles." The "motley group" gave a brief demonstration of strength by discharging their firearms and waving their swords. In the face of determined police resistance Chartist militancy in many areas rapidly dissipated. By the summer there were signs of diminishing support for violent measures, even outright antagonism. The Female Charter Association of Macclesfield, for example, declared in favor of exclusive dealings and effectively routed the "physical force" men who had met in front of Town Hall to drill.<sup>49</sup>

When the Convention reassembled in London on 10 July to prepare for Attwood's presentation of the petition, it was faced with serious problems. The widespread arrests of delegates and their followers, numerous resignations, concern over the upcoming trials, and division over what "ultimate measures" to undertake greatly weakened the assembly's position. The more militant delegates immediately called for a "sacred month" of strikes to commence on 12 August. Despite the Convention's official condemnation of the general strike and the Northern Star's warning that it would "ruin all," several incidents of violence erupted in the winter of 1839-1840. The Star's prediction was fulfilled when

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<sup>49</sup>David Jones, Chartism and the Chartists (New York: St. Martin's Press, 1975), p. 156; Northern Star, 22 June 1839, p. 5.

some 500 Chartists were arrested as a result of disturbances.

With the rejection of the petition by Parliament on 12 July, the abortive attempts at revolutionary action in Newport, Wales and other places, and the incarceration of many Chartists, the movement lost momentum at the close of 1839 and entered into a two year period of relative quietude. Despite the loss of leadership which was keenly felt by the Birmingham Woman's Political Union and so many other local bodies, Chartism was maintained by a low level of activity. In 1838, an unidentified Birmingham female had expressed her hope that "women would persevere, now that they had begun." Although the Chartist movement had disintegrated considerably by the end of 1839, working-class females and males continued to support and participate in the smaller scale activities that characterized the year of 1840. When Chartism would be revived and expanded in new directions in the mid-1840s, women would remain an important element in the Chartist membership.<sup>50</sup>

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<sup>50</sup> Northern Star, 11 November 1839, p. 3; 1 September 1838, p. 6.

## CHAPTER FOUR

### KEEPERS OF THE FLAME, 1840-1848

In the 1840s the Chartists were faced with the monumental task of rebuilding the shattered movement. That Chartism was not "dead" was evidenced by a number of enterprises undertaken by individuals or communities to relieve the suffering of imprisoned leaders and their families. During the quiescent year of 1840, somber reflection on the causes of the movement's collapse in 1839 replaced the former, heady expectations of immediate success. Some ideas concerning the reorganization of Chartism, such as those proposed by R. J. Richardson in his pamphlet, "The Rights of Woman," underscored the necessity of feminine involvement. Other schemes, such as the National Charter Association, sought to place political agitation by working-class men and women on a more secure foundation by developing a central organization to maintain contact among localities. Throughout most of the 1840s female Chartists, especially in the areas of the West Riding of Yorkshire and Lancashire, participated in a variety of endeavors which were designed to rekindle the spirit and strength of Chartism.

After the arrest of Chartist leaders in the winter of 1839-1840, the movement entered into a period of relative dormancy. With the leading figures imprisoned or emigrated, there was no central source of guidance to direct local associations. Disillusioned and fearful of further police action, many rank and file members lost confidence in Chartism. In July the Northern Star reported Mrs. Lapsworth's boast that the

Birmingham Woman's Political Union would "brave all danger and defy all opposition." Five months later she reportedly felt compelled to open a meeting with a disclaimer of intention of any wrongdoing to "any policeman, spy or literary prostitute" who might be present. After November the BWFU seems to have faded out of existence.<sup>51</sup> Other female political unions and female radical associations, such as the one in Hull, shared the same fate. Although feminine support of the Chartist movement "never again attained the extent and dimensions it possessed in 1839," it was not extinct.<sup>52</sup>

Throughout the spring of 1840 the movement was characterized by private or communal action centered around relieving the plight of fellow Chartists. Individuals or local Chartist bodies launched petitions which urged the release of the Welsh "martyrs," undertook collection of money for the defense of incarcerated Chartists, and entered into subscriptions for the financial support of "Whig-made widows." A memorial from the Oldham locality to Queen Victoria on behalf of John Frost, Zephaniah Williams, and William Jones, the leaders of the Newport Rising, was signed by 7,534 females and 11,334 males. In Sunderland women were involved in several activities: five females donated over 8s to the Frost Defense Fund; 3,000 women signed a local petition on behalf of Frost; a Mrs. Mumford and a Mrs. Littlehills publicly endorsed Feargus O'Connor's plan to have the wives of the Welsh leaders appear before the Queen to seek a royal pardon and they contributed over 4s to help defray the expenses. Localized activities such as these provided a sense of

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<sup>51</sup>Northern Star, 6 July 1839, p. 8; 9 November 1839, p. 3

<sup>52</sup>Mark Hovell, The Chartist Movement (Manchester University Press, 1918; reprint ed., 1963), p. 187.

continuity for Chartism and gave some Chartists the hope that the movement could be revised to its former height.<sup>53</sup>

As the winter of 1840 approached, Chartist enterprises became more frequent because the release of national and local leaders furnished a fresh focal point. Leaders like Peter McDouall and John Collins quickly resumed their roles as agitators by commencing an extensive tour of old Chartist strongholds. Anxious to demonstrate their renewed spirit, female Chartists took part in welcoming celebrations and social events. The Leeds Female Chartist Association, for example, resolved to entertain McDouall and Collins at a tea party and ball and to donate the proceeds to Mrs. Mary Frost. At Manchester the grand procession included an escort of 8 maidens arrayed in white and deputations of female radicals of Hulme and Manchester. As a token of esteem the Hulme women presented McDouall with a silk scarf in the radical color, green. The Northern Star reported that he promised to wave it proudly before future audiences as evidence "that the women of Manchester were alive to the importance of the cause." When William Bryne and James Bald Owen were liberated from Durham County Gaol, the females of Stockton-on-Tees met them at the train station. These local leaders were given green plaid silk scarves embellished with the word "Liberty" in gilt letters. This presentation was cited in the Star as proof of "how rapidly political knowledge was progressing, even among females." The women's intention to arrange a ball to benefit Bryne and Owen was called a 'praiseworthy example,' which should be followed by women everywhere.<sup>54</sup>

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<sup>53</sup>Northern Star, 15 February 1840, p. 8; 14 December 1839, p. 1; 1 February 1840, p. 8; 14 March 1840, p. 8.

<sup>54</sup>Northern Star, 10 October 1840, p. 5; 22 August 1840, p. 7; 31 October 1840, p. 1.

A former delegate to the Convention for Manchester and Salford, R. J. Richardson, felt that the future success of the Chartist movement was largely dependent upon feminine involvement. While confined in Lancaster Castle, he had had much time for somber reflection on the causes of the collapse of ~~Chartism~~—violence and the threat of physical force. Since woman was ordained by God to "temper man," she must help curb man's aggressive tendency. In the autumn of 1840, Richardson wrote "The Rights of Woman," a pamphlet aimed at encouraging greater political activity among females. Its main purpose was to present an affirmative answer to the question: "Ought women to interfere in political affairs of their country?" He argued that females had a natural, civil, and political right to become active in public matters, and that feminine participation was an imperative duty and God's will. He supported his reasoning by elaborating upon the role of women as the primary socializers of children and as industrial workers, who greatly contributed to the wealth of the country.<sup>55</sup>

Besides his lengthy defense of his viewpoint, Richardson employed other strategies which were calculated to embolden women. The first was the dedication of his work to Miss Mary Ann Moon "as a mark of esteem for the services she has rendered to the cause of universal liberty." Since she was a moving spirit in the Perth Female Radical Association, he appealed to her to "go on fearlessly advocating the right of woman to interfere in the affairs of state" and to disseminate

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<sup>55</sup>R. J. Richardson, "The Rights of Woman," (Edinburgh: John Duncan, 1840), pp. 1-23. See also, "Extract from 'The Rights of Woman' by R. J. Richardson" in Dorothy Thompson, The Early Chartists, pp. 115-127; Dorothy Thompson, "Women and Nineteenth-Century Radical Politics," pp. 131-132.

his argument to other females. He also added an extra incentive for women—the idea that unmarried females and widows over the age of twenty should be enfranchised. For Richardson, limited female suffrage was a logical extension of natural justice and therefore, might come to pass sometime in the future. Like most Chartists of Northern England, his position on the issue was rather vague. Elizabeth Pease, a writer of the time, noted this ambiguity: "The Chartists generally hold the doctrine of equality of woman's rights--but I am not sure whether they do not consider that when she marries, she merges her political rights in those of her husband." Although a prominent Chartist like Richardson might urge women to play a more equal and co-operative role in working-class politics, they did not recommend that female suffrage become a formal part of the Chartist program.<sup>56</sup>

A laudatory review of "The Rights of Woman" appeared in the Northern Star in January, 1841. The editors "sincerely hoped that this unpretending little pamphlet[would] find its way into every cottage, middle class residence, and palace in the land." It is not surprising that the Star commended Richardson's work at this time, since the pamphlet's focus on pure, political action by women made it a valuable source of propaganda for an O'Connorite organization, the National Charter Association. His persuasive argument could act as a foil to the rival Chartisms—"Knowledge Chartism, Teetotal Chartism, Christian Chartism," which relied heavily upon feminine participation to carry

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<sup>56</sup>R. J. Richardson, "The Rights of Woman," pp. 2, 22-23; Dorothy Thompson, "Women and Nineteenth-Century Radical Politics," p. 131. See Northern Star, 6 June 1839, p. 7 for an address from Miss Moon to Mr. Richardson and others.

out their objects of social and moral regeneration.<sup>57</sup>

The National Charter Association sought to overcome the dissipation of Chartist energies by establishing organizational links throughout Great Britain in order to effectively harness and direct support. Conceived in July, 1840, the NCA found its initial acceptance to be slow. Only 80 local branches had been established by February, 1841. Judging from the Northern Star's reports, only one of these was a women's organization — the Female National Charter Association of Oldham. As the year progressed, however, the NCA attracted more followers. A sign of its growing appeal and greater efficacy was the fact that its petition on behalf of John Frost, which was presented by T. S. Duncombe in May, 1841, had over two million signatures. This total far exceeded that of the National Petition of 1839. An indication of the level of feminine involvement in the NCA's petition campaign was provided by records published in the Northern Star. A few localities furnished separate tallies of female signatures. These were as follows: Oldham with 2,441, Norwich with 4,212, Darlington with 166, Northallerton with 153, and Bradford with 5,526.<sup>58</sup>

The economic depression which set in during the latter half of 1841 and the dynamism of Feargus O'Connor both worked toward increasing adherents to the ranks of the National Charter Association in 1841-1842. O'Connor's impending release from York Castle did much to arouse the latent vitality of Chartism. Throughout the country Chartists hastened to make arrangements for welcoming demonstrations on a grand scale. In

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<sup>57</sup>Northern Star, 30 January 1841, p. 3.

<sup>58</sup>Northern Star, 5 May 1841, p. 8; 15 May 1841, p. 1.



July the female Chartists of Halifax, for example, entered into a subscription to raise money for a new parade banner. A more ambitious project of this nature was undertaken by the Manchester Female Political Union. Having purchased a canvas 8' by 7', they intended to commission a life-size portrait of O'Connor, who was to be dressed in fustian and was to be holding the People's Charter in his hand. In the background there was to be York Castle, a massive crowd, and the figure of "Henry Hunt, the departed coming through the clouds" to speak to O'Connor.<sup>59</sup>

As the date of O'Connor's release approached, the activity of women was also directed to a more serious form of agitation-publishing political addresses. Less than two weeks before the momentous occasion, the female Chartists of Bradford and Manchester both issued appeals to other women to join the Chartist cause. Members of the Female Chartist Committee of Bradford directed their remarks to local women, the "wives and daughters of the oppressed operatives," whose trade was in a state of decline. These females were told that they had the power to overcome their poverty, if they would but use it! The Manchester association addressed a wider audience, all their "sisters . . . in the cause of democracy," who were informed:

If ever there was a time when it was our duty to shake off our lethargy, and engage in a grand struggle for liberty, surely it is now . . . Suffering humanity cries for your assistance at this most important crisis, to endeavour to alleviate the miseries which every where abound amongst the industrious, yet straving millions . . . Up, then brave women of England . . . and join us in the cry for the Charter, which will protect labour, and secure plenty, comfort, and happiness for all! Give us your support in paying due respect to our champions who are about to be released from their dungeons, and lead us on to victory, namely O'Connor, O'Brien, and Benbow.

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<sup>59</sup>Northern Star, 10 July 1841, p. 1; 24 July 1841, p. 1.

In the time of acute economic distress and heady days of expectation before the "Lion of the North" was uncaged, the argument that universal suffrage was a comprehensive panacea still possessed great attraction for working women.<sup>60</sup>

The series of special demonstrations on behalf of O'Connor began at York on the day he was freed, 30 August. Among the throng of well-wishers was a special body of 50 delegates from various parts of the country. The presence of two female delegates, Mrs. Elizabeth Ellis and Mrs. Elizabeth Sumper of Bradford, was perhaps the most telling evidence of feminine support of O'Connor and his brand of Chartism. Their names appear upon an address which was unanimously endorsed by the representatives. It advised working-class people of Great Britain and Ireland:

We should be neglectful of our duty to you if we did not rouse you to redouble exertions as the storm of despotism gathered over our heads; we have a Charter which is the panacea for our wrongs, we have leaders who have been tried and were not found wanting, we have talent and character, and enthusiasm, . . . surely we ought not to stop in the glorious contest when we are within a length of the winning post . . . Uphold the Executive [of the National Charter Association] and you will fill the barren wastes of the national mind with the seeds of golden harvest of freedom and peace.

In the celebrations held in honor of Feargus O'Connor wherever he went on his triumphant tour through the kingdom, women continued to figure prominently. For example, females from Bromsgrove, Reddith, Darlaton, and Wolverhampton marched in the grand procession and women from Birmingham brought up the rear with a long line of carriages, when O'Connor arrived at Birmingham. In Bradford we was the honoree at an elaborate

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<sup>60</sup>Northern Star, 21 August 1841, p 8; 31 July 1841, p. 8.

tea party sponsored by the female Chartists of Manchester-road.<sup>61</sup>

However, as far as women of Northern England and the Midlands are concerned, O'Connor's initial efforts to recruit steady adherents to the National Charter Association met with limited results. By November only the working women of Darlington had resolved to form a female branch of the NCA and to "vie with the men" in the task of procuring signatures for the second National Petition. The year 1842 proved to be more fruitful, since female sections were established in five other localities---Upper Honley and Smallthorn, Bradford, Sheffield, Rochdale, and Belper. Although few in number, these organizations aggressively sought to bring other members of the "fair sex" into the mainstream of Chartism. For example, Sarah Price, the Chairwoman of the branch at Upper Honley and Smallthorn, issued an address that urged "fellow-country women . . . to unite, unite, and by one determined effort, abolish class legislation, and . . . on its ruin plant universal justice and equality, based on the People's Charter." The Bradford female Chartists attempted to spur other women into political activities by resorting to an expression of class antagonism in their address. They contrasted the opulent life style of British royalty with the abject poverty of the laboring class. The ranks of the Sheffield body were increased through a successful membership campaign, which was highlighted by a lecture on the rights and duties of women. In general,

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<sup>61</sup>Northern Star, 4 September 1841, p. 6; English Chartist Circular and Temperance Record for England and Wales v. 1, 1841 (London: John Cleave, printer, reprint ed., New York: Augustus M. Kelley, 1968), p. 129. In the Circular the name of the second woman appears as Elizabeth Simpson. Northern Star, 25 September 1841, p. 1; 4 December 1841,

however, formalized Chartist associations seem to have held little attraction for women outside the area of West Riding of Yorkshire and Lancashire. The National Charter Association had only a smattering of female branches in other areas of Chartist strength, London and Scotland.<sup>62</sup>

On the whole, Chartist optimism ran high in the spring of 1842. In May a Convention met in London to oversee the presentation of the National Petition, which allegedly bore 3,317,752 signatures of working-class men and women. An immense concourse of male and female supporters from London and the delegates proudly escorted the document to Parliament on 2 May. Presented by T. S. Duncombe on the next day, the petition was solidly opposed by a hostile House of Commons. With the rejection of their demands, Chartists were again confronted with the problem of what sanctions to adopt to compel the legislature to make the Charter into a law. When the "Plug Riots" erupted in the manufacturing districts during the summer, some Chartist leaders unwisely attempted to assume control over this spontaneous "general strike." As a result Chartism was again rent assunder by violence and government repression and a number of Chartist leaders were arrested and imprisoned. The year 1842 marked the high point of sustained organization and agitation.

Despite adversity, female Chartists remained active in certain areas of West Riding of Yorkshire, Lancashire, and Nottinghamshire. Throughout the years 1843-1846 local women's organizations in these regions continued to function by holding meetings, soirees, tea parties,

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<sup>62</sup>Northern Star, 27 November 1841, p. 1; 29 January 1842, p. 7; 19 February 1842, p. 7; 22 January 1842, p. 1; 12 February 1842, p. 1; 30 April 1842, p. 8.

subscription drives, and raffles. In August 1843, for example, the female Chartists of Bowling Back-land arranged a soiree in honor of reorganized Chartism in Bradford. At the celebration several women delivered speeches, and resolutions were passed to form a female association; to issue a vote of confidence to Feargus O'Connor and the temperance movement; and to urge male relatives to agitate for the pardon of the Welsh patriots. In the same year the women of Oldham were reported to have come to "a determination to redouble their exertions in the glorious cause of human redemption." Frequent meetings of the female Chartists of Nottingham were held in the local Democratic chapel throughout 1843 and 1844. Besides political activities, they financially supported the Female's Adult and Children's School established by the Misses Abbott. The sprinkling of references to lectures, fundraising projects, and teas held by women at Todmorden, Rochdale, and Oldham continued to appear in the Star until 1846.<sup>63</sup>

After 1845, working-class women were drawn into the Chartist Co-operative Land Society, which was founded by the National Charter Association in the spring of that year. Certainly the traditional radical theme of the loss of land had a tremendous appeal to both sexes. Feargus O'Connor, the main advocate of the Land plan, promoted it in terms that would attract the support of males and females:

There is not one in every thousand of the working classes who would rather not support his wife and family by the sweat of his brow than be compelled to live a prostitute upon their labour. Now, that is the very essence of my [Land] plan . . . I want to see every man in his proper place, woman in her honored position [inside the house], and child reared in the natural affection.

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<sup>63</sup>Northern Star, 19 August 1843, p. 2; 24 June 1843, p. 1; 6 May 1843, p. 1; 3 June 1843, p. 5.

A substantial number of women appear as subscribers in the many payment lists which were printed in the Northern Star. Some females like Henrietta Cubbet, Mary Daves, Elizabeth Ann Elliot, and Martha Good purchased shares outright, while others like Ann Parker, Julia Stanning, and Eliza Arundell subscribed on a weekly basis.<sup>64</sup> As members of local land societies women had an equal chance with men and children at winning an allotment in the lotteries which were held to divide Chartist estates. Barbara Vaughn of Sunderland, for example, won plot number 28 at O'Connorville, the first estate to be founded. Financial difficulties due to the incompetence of the National Land Company's directors resulted in a Parliamentary investigation and the subsequent dissolution of the company in 1845.<sup>65</sup>

From 1845 to 1847 the land settlement scheme overshadowed political activity in the Chartist movement. In the latter half of 1847 as an industrial trade slump worsened, Chartists returned to a course of political action. Chartist candidates stood for seats in the General Election of 1847 and were supported by working-class men and women. In areas, such as Nottingham and Halifax, females apparently were a major force in the successful campaigns of exclusive dealing. Working-class

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<sup>64</sup>The Chartist Co-operative Land Society was founded by the NCA on 19 May. Male and female Chartists were invited to purchase a share at £2 10s outright or by weekly subscriptions of 3d or more. It was calculated that 2,000 paid-in-full subscriptions would generate a capital sum of £5,000. This initial capital would be used to purchase 120 acres of arable land, to build cottages, and to buy livestock and other supplies. The first settlement or estate was to provide 2-acre holdings for 60 cultivators, who were eventually selected in a chance drawing or lottery.

<sup>65</sup>Northern Star and National Trades Journal (London), 1 May 1847, p. 5; 3 July 1847, p. 5; 10 July 1847, p. 5; Alice Mary Hadfield, The Chartist Land Company (Devon, England: David & Charles [Publishers] Limited, 1970), p. 224. On 17 December 1846 the organization's name was changed to the National Co-operative Land Company in recognition of the fact that the name of "Chartist" had taken on negative connotations.

pressure was strong enough for a Chartist, Ernest Jones, to win an election at Halifax. At a soiree given to celebrate his victory, Jones was presented with a gold watch from the female Chartists of that locality. The Northern Star carried a complimentary report concerning the beauty of the many women who were present, while an eyewitness later wrote that he had never seen a tea party equal to this one.<sup>66</sup>

The eruption of continental revolutions in 1848 encouraged some Chartists to believe that England could also be forcibly transformed, **if** the working class were properly organized. This expectation was a compelling force behind the emergence of another National Petition and Convention. Huge demonstrations were held in favor of the Charter throughout Great Britain in the early months of 1848. One would suspect that women took some part in the mass meetings and the petition campaign, but only the participation of the Female National Charter Association of Bradford in the processional to a rally at Skircoat Moor was recorded in the Northern Star. Feminine involvement, which was very much in evidence during the other peak periods of Chartism, 1838-1839 and 1841-1842, was seldom reported in 1848. Except for some isolated instances, the involvement of women in the Chartist movement appears to have ended after 1848.

One indication that females were still interested in Chartism came from the correspondence and reports of the Sheffield Female Political Association (later known as the Sheffield's Women's Rights Association). Although **it** was clearly not a Chartist organization and there is no evidence to suggest that members had been female Chartists, the Sheffield

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<sup>66</sup>Dorothy Thompson, "Women and Nineteenth-Century Radical Politics," p. 135; Northern Star, 28 August 1847, p. 8.

society did make several attempts to ally itself with Chartists. For example, in February 1851, the "female democrats" of Sheffield published an address which suggested this possibility:

We have been observers for a number of years of the various plans, systems and organizations which have been laid down for the better government and guidance of democracy, . . . and we have come to the conclusion, that females might, with the strictest propriety, be included in the programme of the People's Charter . . . We would take it as honor if [Feargus O'Connor] would advocate woman's political enfranchisement.

While the Sheffield association might hope for the "powerful aid" of O'Connor, it found a more concrete source of support in Miss Anne Knight, a middle-class feminist. Given the ambiguous attitude of a Northern Chartist toward the issue of female suffrage, it is not difficult to understand why men like O'Connor did not endorse the activities of these radical females and why at the same time the women might believe Chartist support would be forthcoming. Although male Chartists had once sought out feminine co-operation in the early Chartist movement, they appeared to have ignored this opportunity in 1851. A year later upon the publication of an article by Ernest Jones, "Raising the Charter from the Pot-House," the Sheffield Women Rights Association directed a few remarks to male Chartists:

We beg to state . . . that did our brothers but admit our rights to the enjoyment of those political privileges they are striving for, they would find accession of advocates in the female sex, who would not only raise the Charter from those dens of infamy and vice . . . but would, with womanly pride, strive to erase that stigma which by the folly of our brothers has been cast on Chartism, not only by exercising their influence out of doors, but by teaching their children a good sound political education. This, sir will never be done while men continue to advocate or meet in pot-houses, spending their money, and debarring us from a share in their political freedom.



By the middle of the nineteenth century, women's participation in **Chartism** had disintegrated. The reluctance of **O'Connor** and others to make the right of women to vote a part of the Chartist program ended the last attempt to revive feminine involvement in Northern England.<sup>67</sup>

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<sup>67</sup>Northern Star, 22 February 1851, p. 1; Notes to the People (London), v. II, 1852, p. 515; see also Dorothy Thompson, "Women and Nineteenth-Century Radical Politics," pp. 135-138.

## CHAPTER V

### THE FLICKER IN LONDON, 1838-1848

The complexion of feminine involvement in London **Chartism** was, in many respects, markedly different from the character of provincial activity. Compared to the mobilization of widespread feminine support in the manufacturing districts in 1838-1839, radical activity on the part of London women was negligible. Their inactivity was a reflection of the apathetic attitude generally evinced in the capital at this time. When finally London emerged as a formidable Chartist center in 1841-1842, various Chartist enterprises vied for the support of females. Although splinter organizations such as Chartist temperance societies and the National Association were of an ephemeral nature, their programs of social and moral regeneration emphasized the value of feminine co-operation. In the mid 1840s female Chartists acting within the mainstream of **Chartism** became a conspicuous, although minor, element in London for the first and only time. In this period two metropolitan women, Miss Susannah Inge and Miss Mary Ann Walker, entered into the Chartist movement and somewhat expanded the latitude of feminine expression. Under the leadership of H. Mander May, the females in one section were imbued with the revolutionary fervor that seized the capital in the turbulent year, 1848.

By the summer of 1839, there appear to have been only two women's organizations in the whole city, the Wandsworth Female Chartist Association and the London Female Democratic Association. Relatively little is known about either one. **Beyond** the fact that the Wandsworth women

endorsed a local protest against the opportunistic tactics of a body of ultra-radicals, **it** can be assumed that they took part in the spirited collection of national rent and signatures praised by the Northern Star.<sup>68</sup> The only reported activity of the female section of the London Democratic Association was the publication of an address in the Star in May, 1839. Their appeal to English women, "particularly to the women of the metropolis," demonstrated an astute awareness of the impediments to successful agitation of females in London and a tinge of ultra-radical sentiments. Signed by Elizabeth Neesom, the document of the LFDA advised:

Sisters and friends, . . . shake off that apathy and timidity which too generally prevails among our sex (arising from the prejudices of false education), and join us in our holy cause. . . . If females removed from the sphere of our order could but see the privations, the squalid misery, the incessant, **ill**-requited toil of thousands of their own sex . . . [in the Northern textile districts], . . . what would they think of such unchristianlike, inhuman laws [as the New Poor Law] and [its] institutions? . . . There is no knowing what a few months may bring forth; many that are now in comparatively affluent circumstances, may be reduced to the horrible situations here described. Rally around our standard, and do not by your own culpable apathy have to recollect, that you yourselves have been the cause of your own ruin.

The compelling "fear of want" and oppressive possibility of seeking relief in a grim Poor Law union were not powerful sources of feminine motivation and justification in London as they had been in Northern England. The attempt of the women in the LFDA to enlist the sympathies of their sisters appears to have had no discernible effect. The absence of acute economic distress, the non-existence of fiery anti-Poor Law campaign, and the general failure of male leadership to agitate females, proved to be serious liabilities. Whereas provincial females could argue that politics disrupted

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<sup>68</sup>David Goodway, London Chartism, 1838-1848 (Cambridge, England: Cambridge University Press, 1982), pp. 26-27, p. 35.

their domestic sphere, the female democrats of the capital city had to seek a different defense of their political involvement. They argued: "To those who may be . . . surprised that females should be daring enough to interfere with politics; to them we simply say that as **it** is a female that assumes to rule this nation, . . . we assert . . . our right, as free women (or as women determined to be free) to rule ourselves."<sup>69</sup>

Weak, unstable organizations, such as the LFDA, were probably the first to succumb to the effects of Chartist disintegration in the winter of 1839-1840. Since metropolitan females had never played an important role at the height of Chartism, **it** is not surprising that one finds no indication of feminine activity during the quiescent year, 1840. There is no record that the women of London were involved in the collection of money for defense funds, in subscriptions for the relief of Chartist dependents, or in the procuring of signatures on petitions on the behalf of the Welsh leaders. In the capital city, feminine participation in **Chartism** at this juncture was apparently nonexistent.

**I**t is only after 1840 that the Chartist movement gradually became a viable force in London radicalism and that local females became a vocal element in the membership. The ferment of revitalization schemes led to the establishment of two rival Chartist enterprises, both of which had the potential of attracting women away from mainstream **Chartism**. The National Association for Promoting the Political and Social Improvement of the People proposed by William Lovett and the Chartist temperance societies advocated by Henry Vincent were both established in London

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<sup>69</sup>Northern Star, 11 May 1839, p. 2.

in 1841. Although these were distinct movements, they were closely aligned on questions of sobriety, self-improvement, and reliance upon females to support their aims.

The leading proponents of these breakaway movements, Lovett and Vincent, had always emphasized the necessity of involving the "fair sex" in public matters. For example, in his autobiography, Life and Struggles, William Lovett revealed how he took time to discuss political issues of the day with his wife, Mary. Since Lovett and Vincent were founding members of the London Working Man's Association, one can assume that they influenced the tone of this organization's initial address. **It** advised other such associations:

And, as our object is universal, so (consistent with justice) ought to be our means to compass **it**; and we know not of any means more efficient, than to enlist the sympathies and quicken the intellects of our wives and children to a knowledge of their rights and duties; for as in the absence of knowledge, they are the most formidable obstacles to a man's patriotic exertions, so when imbued with **it** will they prove his greatest auxiliaries. Read, therefore, talk, and politically and morally instruct your wives and children.

Perhaps Lovett and Vincent were among the members of the LWMA who sought to include a provision for female suffrage in the first draft of the "People's Charter." In his autobiography **it** is clear that William Lovett regretted its exclusion.<sup>70</sup> As a Chartist lecturer Henry Vincent continued to speak highly of the significant role of women. In November, 1838, he informed the females of Banbury that they were "the most important portion of the human race, because the character and conduct of the people depends much on your intellect and your exertion."<sup>71</sup>

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<sup>70</sup>William Lovett, The Life and Struggles of William Lovett (London: Trunber & Co., 1876), pp, 39, 96, 170.

<sup>71</sup>Brian Harrison, "Teetotal Chartism," History 58 (June 1973): 201.

Given the favorable predisposition of these two Chartist leaders towards the women's part in social and political matters, **it** is not surprising that Lovett and Vincent sought feminine support for their reorganization-  
a1 plans.

While confined in Warwick Gaol, William Lovett, with the aid of John Collins, wrote a pamphlet, Chartism, A ~~New~~ Organization of the People. His purpose was to persuade Chartists to form National Associations which would sponsor the erection of public halls and a variety of schools. **By** recreating Chartism as an educational movement, they hoped to foster the moral and intellectual regeneration of the working class, and therefore, prepare them to exercise the political rights demanded in the Charter. In their proposal Lovett and Collins provided for females to be admitted as members in the organizations and schools on the same conditions as males: "As some prejudices exist on the subject of female education, and especially against their obtaining any knowledge of politics, **it** may be necessary to give a few reasons in support of our proposition." Of the various points advanced, the most important was that: "Women are the chief instructors of our children, whose virtues and vices will depend more on the education given them by their mothers than on that of any teacher we can employ to instruct them."<sup>72</sup>

In November, 1841, the first branch of the National Association was established in London. Lovett's willingness to cooperate with "persons of all creeds, classes, and opinions" to promote his organization, attracted many subscribers, some of whom were advocates of the doctrine

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<sup>72</sup>William Lovett and John Collins, Chartism, A ~~New~~ Organization of the People (London: John Cleave, 1840; reprint ed., Leicester, England: Leicester University Press, 1969), pp. 61-63.

of women's rights--Henry Vincent, Charles H. Neesom, and J. H. Parry. By the spring of 1842, Lovett and his associates had founded a hall in Holborn and were issuing their own journal, The National Association Gazette. Although Holborn Hall had a library, a coffee room, a Sunday school, and classes in dancing and music, insufficient funds kept Lovett and his followers from implementing any further the establishment of numerous schools that had been outlined in the original proposal.<sup>73</sup>

The hostility of the Northern Star to the rival forms of Chartism and the absence of pertinent information in Lovett's Life and Struggles makes it difficult to determine what measure of support the London association and the public hall received from women during their seven years' existence. Certainly, the National Association endeavored to attract female members, because the original rules and objectives were altered to include the following goal: "To disseminate such facts and opinions in favour of the political and social rights of women as may lead to their enfranchisement, and the amelioration of their social condition."<sup>74</sup> Also, The National Association Gazette carried letters from female Chartists and declared that it hoped that working-class men could overcome their "ungenerous policy [of being unwilling to] advocate the

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<sup>73</sup>William Lovett, Life, pp. 286-288.

<sup>74</sup>The ten rules and objectives of the National Association given in Chartism by William Lovett and John Collins, pp. 24-26 and in Life by William Lovett, pp. 248-250 are essentially worded the same, but the numerical order does not coincide. Neither of these sources lists an objective concerning female suffrage. However, in G. D. H. Cole and A. W. Filson, British Working Class Movements: Select Documents, 1789-1875 (New York: St. Martin's Press, 1967), pp. 380-381, there are only eight objectives listed. The third one concerns female enfranchisement and is cited there. I would assume that this extract of "rules and objects" originally appeared in The National Association Gazette and applies specifically to the London branch.

admission of women into the representation lest it should delay their own."<sup>75</sup>

The participation of female Chartists of London in "Teetotal Chartism" is more evident. Among the handful of local Chartist temperance societies, there was one exclusively female organization, the East London Female Total Abstinence Association. In January, 1841, this body issued a lengthy address enumerating the evils connected with alcohol and tobacco. These female abstainers also contended that sobriety was a step towards the cultivation of women's mental faculties, which hitherto had been largely ignored. In conclusion, their fellow countrywomen were urged to unite to remove intemperance and to agitate for the "People's Charter." A month later members were reported to be rejoicing at the numerous female testimonies to the benefits of abstinence and to be "joining in the singing of patriotic and sentimental ballads, and the delivery of excellent recitations." In 1841, Elizabeth and Charles Neesom, who had been associated with the London Democratic Association, became the leading figures in the Chartist temperance societies in Spitalfields and in Lovett's National Association.<sup>76</sup>

In 1841, the rival Chartisms and the National Charter Association were all attempting to recruit London Chartists. To draw the "fair sex" into the NCA, an O'Connorite, John Watkins, and the London Delegate

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<sup>75</sup>Dorothy Thompson, "Women in Nineteenth-Century Radical Politics," p. 133. This "ungenerous policy" was not without foundation, see Edward Swaine, "The Political Franchise," (London: Patridge & Oakey, 1849), pp. 33-35. Swaine, a middle-class liberal, would support male enfranchisement, but would exclude women.

<sup>76</sup>Northern Star, 30 January 1841, p. 1; 27 March 1841, p. 2; Brian Harrison, "Teetotal Chartism," p. 199.



Council both published appeals in the English Chartist Circular. Watkins tried to rouse women to take political action by utilizing the argument that had been so effective in Northern England in the late Thirties that feminine involvement was in defense of the domestic sphere. He also offered the incentive of limited franchise for maidens and widows. The London Delegate Council, on the other hand, vaguely asked females to lend their emotional support to male Chartists. These addresses sparked a slight response in the area of East London. The Northern Star reported that a female member of the City Charter Association, Martha Fosslyn, urged other women of the "Queendom" to become Chartists. In December the Female Chartist Committee of the Borough of Tower Hamlets sent an address to the Northern Star which called for feminine agitation on behalf of the Charter. It was not published due to the lack of space. Although feminine participation in mainstream Chartism in 1841 was more apparent than it had been in either "Knowledge Chartism" or "Teetotal Chartism," it was limited. There is no further indication of any political activity being taken by female Chartists in London until the summer of 1842.<sup>77</sup>

In June, 1842, a member of the Female Chartist Association of the City of London, Miss Susannah Inge, took the initiative to issue a personal address to her fellow countrywomen. Her attitude towards the role of women in society and their position in the political arena was far from conventional. Inge contended that the time had arrived when a woman is aware of the "social miseries by which she is surrounded" and "has

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<sup>77</sup> English Chartist Circular, v. I, 1841, pp. 49, 133; Northern Star, 15 August 1841, p. 5; 4 December 1841, p. 4.

embarked with her light boat upon the ocean of agitation." She proceeded to reveal that an acute sense of intellectual dissatisfaction rather than personal deprivation motivated her involvement in the Chartist movement. She wrote:

As civilisation advances ~~man~~ gradually becomes more inclined to place ~~woman~~ on an equality with himself, and though excluded from every thing connected with public life, her condition is considerably improved; still she is regarded in an inferior light, her province being only to make a pudding, prepare a dinner, clean the house, tend to her children, . . . and such like. Now these are all necessary things, . . . but are we, because we are women, to be excluded from the more rational enjoyments of life?

Shall we sit still and tamely submit to a slavery against which our cheeks glow with shame and our hearts burn with indignation? No! . . . Rouse yourself to a sense of your merits. Assist those ~~men~~ who will, nay, who do place ~~women~~ in . . . equality with themselves in gaining their rights, and yours will be gained also . . . Join with us, then, for the Charter alone will give us . . . [the] liberty [that] is our birthright.

Susannah Inge was the only known female Chartist to ever present such a strong expression of sexual oppression.<sup>78</sup>

By the autumn of 1842, there was a move to enlist Miss Inge and like-minded ~~women~~ into a female branch of the National Charter Association. A Chartist activist, Ruffy Ridley, and several other male leaders who favored greater feminine participation in political and social matters, called a meeting in Old Bailey on 17 October 1842. One member of the audience, a Mr. Cohen, proved however, to be a "false friend." He opposed the motion to establish a female organization and disagreed with Ridley's judgment that ~~women~~ should aspire to enter the political mainstream. His sentiments were recorded by an observer: "Woman . . . would be more in her proper character and station at home, . . . [because] she

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<sup>78</sup>Northern Star, 2 July 1842, p. 7.

was not, 'physically' considered, intended for . . . the political arena." The Times reported the sharp exchange which ensued between Cohen and his principal challengers, Miss Susannah Inge and Miss Mary Anne Walker. In response to Cohen's negative remark, Miss Inge had inferred that if Queen Victoria could hold the highest public office in the kingdom, then other females were capable of voting--a task which required little "physical force." Disclaiming any intention of ridicule, Cohen asked Inge to suppose that she was a representative in the House of Commons, then to consider whether she could best serve the public interest when her heart might be easily swayed by "a lover," a young gentleman in Parliament. Miss Walker adroitly repudiated his insinuations, then proceeded to launch a defense of feminine involvement in public matters on humanitarian grounds and to issue a spirited call for other women in the audience to enroll in the NCA.<sup>79</sup>

An "exordium" which stressed the absurdity of the behavior of the two chief "hen Chartists," Susannah Inge and Mary Anne Walker, was printed in the Times just two days after the first account of the meeting in Old Bailey. A number of disparaging remarks were interspersed within a shortened version of the original story. For example, Miss Walker's threat to scorn any "contemptible scoundrel," who attempted to persuade her vote, drew the following comment: "The man who could run such a risk had need be PERSEUS, [the slayer of Medusa], or JACK THE GANT KILLER at least."<sup>80</sup>

This sarcastic piece, in turn, elicited a lengthy retort and a

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<sup>79</sup>Times (London), 20 October 1842, (London: Recordovak Division of Kodak, Ltd., n.d., p. 3.

<sup>80</sup>Times, 22 October 1842, p. 4.

defense in the English Chartist Circular. An anonymous author, "Pro-Chartist," argued that the main issue at stake was not female suffrage as the Times implied, "but the right of woman to exercise her volition as to how, when, and where she shall employ her faculties." The writer concluded that: "To the promptings of her own heart and intellect we would leave the decision; and whether **it** be in private or public, through the press or on the platform, by works of charity or zeal, that she seeks to vindicate her claim to aid in the moral, social, and political advancement of mankind, she is entitled, not merely to the most respectful and considerate treatment, but the encouragement of sincere and considerate sympathy."<sup>81</sup>

Despite the efforts of the conservative press to deprecate their actions, Susannah Inge and Mary Ann Walker (for a limited period) came out as vocal and visible advocates of Chartism. Since they defied the bounds of convention to become Chartist lecturers speaking before mixed audiences, these women have the rare distinction of having their physical presence or likenesses recorded for posterity. Miss Inge was reported to be "a young lady of pre-possessing appearance . . . with an energy and spirit, worthy of the great and glorious cause." While Miss Walker was described as being "about middle height, slightly formed but with pleasing features, dark eyes and hair, and a cast of countenance decidedly intellectual."<sup>82</sup>

On 29 October 1842, Susannah Inge delivered her first speech in favor of the Charter at the National Charter Association hall, Old

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<sup>81</sup>English Chartist Circular, v. II, 1842, p. 152.

<sup>82</sup>Northern Star, 5 November 1842, p. 1; Edmund and Ruth Frow, "Women in the Early Radical and Labour Movement," p. 112. Also see the above mentioned article in the Star for a description of Miss Walker.

Bailey, before a packed audience of females and male "operatives." The Northern Star reported that ~~it~~ was "a very splendid lecture—a lecture which we may without flattery say, would do honour to the highest talents of man, and which proved that woman, 'mentally' considered, is in every way fitted and endowed by nature for the exercise of political rights." On that occasion Mary Ann Walker, who was present, did not speak, "owing to her not being sufficiently recovered from a recent indisposition." Three other female Chartists, Miss Emma Miles, Mrs. Frances Wyatt, and a Miss Pickup, however, did address the meeting. After a brief period of mourning for her father, Miss Walker appeared before a public audience on 5 December 1842 at the National Association hall in Holborn. Her speech was recorded in the Northern Star in its entirety, including her able defense against hecklers. Since there were no further reports about Mary Anne Walker and her activities after this event, ~~it~~ is difficult to assume that she remained a prominent advocate of the Chartist movement. There were, however, several notices in the Star concerning the lectures presented by Susannah Inge at the Working Man's Association at Mile End Road throughout 1843.<sup>83</sup>

The outspoken Miss Inge proved to be somewhat of a liability to Chartism as propounded by Feargus O'Connor. In July, 1843 she dared to challenge the right of O'Connor to suggest that his right-hand man, Thomas M. Wheeler, be elected to a full-time office in the Executive of the NCA. In a letter to the editor of the Northern Star she complained that such a practice did not accord with her ideas of democracy. The

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<sup>83</sup>Northern Star, 5 November 1842, p. 1; 10 December 1842, p. 7; 29 July 1843, p. 2; 26 August 1843, p. 4; 2 September 1843, p. 2.

editor, William Hill, denied that Chartists were foolish enough to blindly follow O'Connor. He snidely remarked: "We dare say Miss Inge is greatly in love with her own ideas of democracy; and so she ought to be, for we fancy they will suit nobody else," (especially an O'Connorite!). The exchange between Hill and Inge was picked up by hostile newspapers, the Birmingham Advertiser and the Nottingham Journal. Entitled "The He and She Chartists," their news item greatly magnified the incident to unrealistic proportions and added the name of Miss Walker as one of the leaders of the feminine opposition. After this incident the Star accorded only nominal recognition to the activities of Miss Inge, and in 1844 the editor even refused to publish her letters to the Bishop of Exeter. Perhaps the apparent coolness of Feargus O'Connor's mouthpiece influenced the withdrawal of Miss Inge from public life after 1844.<sup>84</sup>

Direct references to feminine participation in London Chartism temporarily ended with the last known activity of Susannah Inge. Judging from the Northern Star, metropolitan women did not take an active role in the movement during 1845, 1846 and 1847. It is only by inference that females can be connected to the main enterprise of these years, the Chartist land settlement. For example, Christopher Doyle, a company director, delivered a lecture at Whitechapel on the benefits of the Land Plan. The Star reported that Doyle advised "the ladies to lay out their money with those only who were favourable to the cause." It is not clear as to whether he meant to encourage women to become shareholders in the company or to practice "exclusive dealing."<sup>85</sup>

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<sup>84</sup>Northern Star, 8 July 1843, p. 4; 29 July 1843, p. 4.

<sup>85</sup>Ibid., 14 September 1844, p. 5.

The last flicker of feminine involvement occurred in London during the turbulent spring and summer of 1848. The February revolution in Paris provided further impetus for the third National Petition, which was launched in the winter of 1847-1848. As the date for the presentation of the petition approached, massive demonstrations, such as the one at Trafalgar Square in March, were staged by Chartist leaders and attended by working-class men and women. On 10 April females were among the vast sea of Londoners who escorted the petition to Parliament. Although the document was ridiculed in the House of Commons because the total number of signatures fell far below the boasted sum of five million, London Chartists did not lose faith in the movement. In fact, the capital became a Chartist center of violent disorder and revolutionary talk. In one metropolitan locality, Tower Hamlets, the female Chartists were organized under the direct of H. Mander May. As the president of the Female Tower Hamlets Chartist Society, he issued an appeal to female Chartists to exert their influence through "exclusive dealing." He advised other women to adopt a motto like that of the women of Tower Hamlets — "Live with our men; die by, or for them." After this instance of organized feminine activity, there were no others. Feminine participation in London Chartism apparently came to an end.<sup>86</sup>

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<sup>86</sup>Northern Star and National Trades Journal (London), 24 June 1848, p. 6.

## CONCLUSION

### CHAPTER VI

Although the participation of "sister democrats" was recognized as a crucial factor in the success of Chartism by men like Thomas C. Salt, the significance of feminine involvement has been overlooked by historians of the movement in general. This study has demonstrated the fact that women took part in almost every aspect of the campaign during its first ten years of existence. In the years between 1838 and 1848, when the Chartist movement was the main vehicle of working-class radicalism, women in large numbers accompanied the men in entering the political arena. The extent, scale, and character of feminine activity were largely influenced by regional differences and directly correlated to economic fluctuations. The wide differences of culture and outlook between provincial and metropolitan females resulted in a great variety of political experiences and attitudes. Recognition of the diversity of the social and political aspirations among female Chartists helps to answer the question of whether Chartism fostered the birth of working-class feminism.

The feminine presence was especially prominent in the periods of stormy upsurge, 1838-1848 and 1841-1842, in the Chartist centers of the West Riding of Yorkshire, the East and West Midlands, and South Lancashire. With the exception of sections of Durham County and Northumberland, the participation of women outside these strongholds was sporadic, where existent at all. Feminine involvement in London Chartism, for example, was spasmodic and was confined to a small number of vocal



supporters. In the mid-1840s the role of working-class females in the Chartist movement was greatly reduced in scope and was limited to a few localities in Yorkshire, Lancashire, and Nottinghamshire. At that time women in the capital city were always a minority in local membership and in comparison to female Chartists in Northern England. Yet, in 1842 and 1843, a few London women formed a conspicuous element in the Chartist ranks. Since there were no exclusively female branches of the Chartist land society, 1845-1848, feminine support in this enterprise can only be discerned through the listing of names of individuals in the rolls of shareholders. One would suspect that a large number of women took part in the mass meetings and petition drive of 1848. Organized participation, however, seems to have occurred only in Bradford and Tower Hamlets (London).

The role of working-class women in the early Chartist movement was largely shaped by local tradition, economic and social conditions, local leadership or the impact of Chartist "missionaries." The presence or absence of these factors greatly contributed to the success or failure of efforts to mobilize feminine support. All these forces were at work in the northern manufacturing districts during the peak periods of Chartism. There one found a coherent tradition of radicalism among females; social and economic dislocation resulting from the bitter industrial experience and the deepening economic depression in 1837 and 1841; and the presence of men like Thomas C. Salt and R. J. Richardson, who actively solicited feminine co-operation. The existence of all these conditions facilitated the establishment of numerous female organizations in places such as Birmingham, Bradford, and Manchester. In London the lack of acute economic distress, the absence of recent mass radicalism, and the general failure of male leaders to arouse enthusiasm for political involvement on the part of females, proved to be insurmountable

obstacles to the rousing of widespread feminine participation. In the initial phase of the movement, 1841-1842, there were a few male Chartists in the capital city who overtly encouraged women to enter into political activities on an equal footing with men, and this led to a brief flurry of feminine involvement there in 1842 and 1843.

During the early years of the Chartist movement, the immediate sense of crisis in the Midlands and the North motivated working-class women to take political action. Females like those from Newcastle-upon-Tyne and Ashton, supported the "People's Charter" because they believed that universal manhood suffrage would lead to the amelioration of their grim condition. They sought to be liberated from the "fear of want," the oppressive possibility of being separated from their husbands and children in a Poor Law union, and from their incessant and degrading toil in the factories. For these reasons they were visible and vocal in every form of Chartist activity, with the exceptions of becoming delegates to the Conventions, national leaders, or lecturers.

Women like Mrs. Lapsworth, the president of the Birmingham Woman's Political Union, did assume positions of leadership within female associations. They chaired female public meetings, addressed the membership on current issues and business, and worked with male leaders to coordinate agitation. The participation of female Chartists in the practice of one kind of working-class pressure, "exclusive dealing," was recognized as a decisive factor in its success. Their contributions in terms of procuring signatures for the national petitions and for those on behalf of the Welsh "martyrs," of collecting money for a variety of causes, and of organizing social or political demonstrations of popular support for the Chartist program was highly praised by male leaders and

widely publicized in the Northern Star. In general, the significance and the nature of the role of working-class women in such areas as South Lancashire and the West Riding of Yorkshire were comparable to that of the male rank and file.

The character of feminine radicalism in London was distinguished from the complexion of provincial activities in many ways. In comparison to the multifaceted nature of the political action undertaken by women in other Chartist centers at the high points of Chartism, radical activity on the part of metropolitan women was rather exiguous. Whereas a large number of female Chartists elsewhere were motivated by the fact that class legislation disrupted the domestic sphere, those in the capital city exhibited a sense of remoteness from personal suffering. The few known female advocates of Chartism in London presented different arguments to justify their involvement in public matters. Elizabeth Neesom, Susannah Inge, and Mary Anne Walker contended that an awareness of the abject poverty and misfortune of others compelled them to endorse the Charter as a means of alleviating social miseries. These women entered into the Chartist movement because they also perceived the potential opportunities to utilize their intellectual capacities in the service of humanity. Of these three females, however, only Miss Inge explicitly voiced the notion that the "fair sex" was sexually oppressed by prevailing standards concerning the "province of woman."<sup>11</sup>

In London there were a few men like William Lovett, Henry Vincent, Charles Neesom, and Ruffy Ridley, who actively encouraged women to aspire to greater freedom of expression. Although they were favorably disposed towards the principle of social and political rights for females, these male Chartists did not reflect the mainstream of public opinion-and in

some instances encountered opposition from other men in the movement. In this somewhat more receptive atmosphere of the metropolis, independent women like Susannah Inge and Mary Anne Walker overstepped customary boundaries of proper behavior to become Chartist lecturers and to speak in public before a mixed audience. In this short period of openness and experiment they somewhat expanded the latitude of feminine expression.

A clear appreciation of the markedly different social and political aspirations of provincial and metropolitan females is necessary to determine whether female Chartist as a whole can be considered early feminists. In general, there was a noticeable shift towards a more equal and co-operative kind of political activity on the part of women during the early Chartist movement. Some qualification must be made in regard to this generalization lest it be stretched beyond the point of validity. First, in the areas of continuous feminine support of Chartism, South Lancashire and the West Riding of Yorkshire, there was a history of feminine involvement in working-class radicalism. In communities such as Bradford women had taken part in political and social activities prior to the advent of the Chartist movement. Second, there is no indication that this effect of greater participation extended beyond the year 1848. Working-class women appear to have retreated from radical politics in the mid-nineteenth century.<sup>87</sup> Third, the interpretation of Chartism as the breeding ground for feminism suggested by S. Barbara Kanner in her bibliographical essay and advanced by Carol Bauer and Lawrence Ritt in Free and Ennobled was based upon London sources, They referred primarily

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<sup>87</sup>This is the thesis of Dorothy Thompson's article, "Women and Nineteenth-Century Radical Politics," pp. 112-138.

to William Lovett's autobiography and articles which appeared in the English Chartist Circular.<sup>88</sup> The more cosmopolitan outlook and attitudes of a handful of men and women who moved outside the mainstream of Chart-ist thought, should not be considered representative of the views held by the majority of Chartists.

In Northern England the issue of female suffrage was rarely discussed by either female or male Chartists. In general, women in the manufacturing districts did not express a desire for, or an expectation of, the right to vote. Their main concern was to obtain universal man-hood suffrage, because they optimistically believed that the enfranchise-ment of working-class men would lead to the abolition of class legislation. For themselves they wanted the opportunity to return to their homes and fulfill their roles as wives and mothers.

It is only in the metropolis that the doctrine of the equality of women was frequently endorsed by men like William Lovett and by women like Susannah Inge. With the exception of the London branch of the National Association established by William Lovett, the issue of the ad-mission of females to the franchise never became a formal part of the Chartist program. To apply a blanket assumption that all, or even most, female and male Chartists were proponents of equal social and political rights for women is to obscure the considerable gulf that existed between the social and political attitudes of provincial and metropolitan Chartists. It is equally inaccurate to disregard the significance of the role of working-class women in the early Chartist movement.

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<sup>88</sup>For a discussion of these specific sources see Chapter V.

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