

THE HISTORIOGRAPHY OF THE
CHARTIST MOVEMENT
1854 - 1975

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Presented to
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of the Requirements for the Degree
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by
Peter J. T. Shaw
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PREFACE

This thesis seeks to examine the varied and often complex manner in which historians have approached the study of the Chartist Movement from the middle of the nineteenth century until the present. The thesis also aims to examine, in some detail, the basic source materials of Chartism and their use by historians. An assessment is made of how far value judgments and historians' symbiotic relationships with their society affected studies of the Movement.

A major problem with the thesis has been the sheer volume of work on Chartism. The last twenty years have witnessed an unprecedented upsurge in interest in Chartism amongst scholars: partly a consequence of the increased development of socialist theory both within the British Labour Party - increasingly an established party of government - and amongst the "New Left", and partly of a general movement in academic circles towards the study of social history so long neglected by historians. A further problem with the thesis has been the difficulty of dividing the chronology of Chartist historiography into necessarily arbitrary sections.

The concluding chapter of the thesis suggests new methods of analysing and studying Chartism using the methodology of sociology and other social sciences in an attempt to solve the extraordinarily difficult problem of determining rank-and-file opinion and the total impact of Chartism on ordinary people.

A final plea is made to consider ordinary Chartists as "men and women of flesh and blood" who, far from being faceless robots, were deeply influenced by Chartist poetry and songs; reacting in a very human, if not entirely logical way, to the social upheavals and traumas of the Chartist period.

A particular debt of gratitude is owed to the staff of the Department of History of the University College of Swansea and Dr. David Jones in particular who initiated my interest in Chartism; to the staff of the Elizabeth Dafoe Library and the Department of History of the University of Manitoba; and finally to Dr. Keith Sandiford without whose invaluable help and guidance the thesis would never have been completed.

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CHAPTER I

The Place of Chartism in British History

Chartism has been correctly termed "one of the most complex and difficult subjects in English history".¹ This would not, at first, seem to be the case: it could be argued that Chartism was simply a movement of the emerging working class whose sole aim was to gain a programme of political reform as laid down in the "People's Charter" issued in the spring of 1838. The "Charter" was drawn up by William Lovett, an artisan cabinet-maker and leader of the London Working Men's Association, with the assistance of Francis Place, the London tailor and friend of many influential radicals. The programme would, indeed, appear to be both a logical development of the political reform movements of the eighteenth century led by such diverse men as Thomas Hardy of the London Corresponding Society and Major Cartwright of the Hampden Clubs, and a logical extension of the working man's political ambitions to match his increased economic role in the developing Industrial Revolution.

The traditional treatment of Chartism by historians has emphasised how the famous "six points of the Charter" were all gradually accepted in a typically British spirit of caution and compromise, except for the "obviously futile" idea of annual elections. This acceptance of the five points - universal manhood suffrage, equal electoral districts, the secret ballot, abolition

¹R. K. Webb, Modern England (London, 1969), p.248.

of the property qualification for membership of the House of Commons and payment of members - was generally hailed as an illustration of the superiority of the British social and political system over that of the Continent and the basic loyalty and hatred of revolution of the British working class. The latter point was usually viewed as being proved by the avoidance of full-scale violence on a national scale when the Chartist Petition was presented in 1839, 1842 and 1848.

The nineteenth century British traditions of historiography associated with such Victorian historians as J. R. Green, Lord Acton, Samuel Gardiner and William Stubbs, were singularly unsuitable for initiating worthwhile studies of Chartism. The 1860's and 1870's were decades when liberalism and positivism became the basis of British historiographical methodology. Historians followed Ranke's dictum that history should "show how it really was."² Facts in history were equated with scientific facts; thus Acton, Stubbs, Maitland and Gardiner produced vast works full of detail combined with moral judgement. The latter avoided the need to frame general historical laws as Comte had done. Instead historians could follow Acton and "judge, and judge fiercely" as "progress in the direction of organized and assured freedom, is the characteristic fact of Modern History, and its tribute to the theory of Providence." Too often, however, they neglected the other side of Acton which realised that impartiality

² Quoted by Stedman Jones, G., "The Pathology of English History," New Left Review No. 46 (1967), p.29.

was the "only character of legitimate history".³

Victorian historians therefore concentrated on great men and constitutional history; they wrote very little on social, economic and cultural history as sources were often less readily available and facts not empirically verifiable. Chartism was therefore usually ignored completely or, at best, given a short mention as part of the inevitable progress of the English Constitution towards its present peak of civil, religious and political liberty.

The handful of Victorian historians who mentioned Chartism at all - Justin McCarthy, Spencer Walpole and J. H. Rose⁴ - relied exclusively on official, anti-Chartist sources such as Hansard, Annual Register and The Times.

The question of sources and their use is the central problem of Chartist historiography. Unlike constitutional history and the history of great men, the history of Chartism has to be painstakingly pieced together using the memoirs of ex-Chartists; the provincial, national and Chartist press; the Place Papers; the H. O. Papers and papers in the P. R. O.; and more obscure and often ephemeral sources such as pamphlets, broadsides, handbills and posters.

Chartist memoirs, for example, often gave an invaluable first-hand account of the movement, and, almost without exception,

³J. R. Hale (ed.), The Evolution of British Historiography (New York, 1964), p.68.

⁴J. McCarthy, A History of Our Own Times (4 vols.; London, 1880).
S. Walpole, History of England (6 vols.; 1902-1905).
J. H. Rose, The Rise of Democracy (London, 1898).

succeeded in portraying a sense of working class solidarity and pride in the achievements of working people since the Chartist period. Their use requires considerable care, however, if they are not to give a distorted interpretation of Chartism. While all the memoirs remained loyal to the Charter, most were strongly affected by the extremely pervasive Gladstonian Liberalism of the late nineteenth century. Other difficulties arose from lapses of memory, personal vindictiveness and an anxiety to exonerate themselves from association with any Chartist violence. Memoir writers also had a very provincial outlook and reflected the extremely diverse movement of Chartism to a very limited extent. Only the successful and fairly comfortable Chartists such as Adams, Frost, Gammage, Linton and Wilson⁵ could afford the time and money to publish memoirs. Thomas Ainge Devyr's Odd Book of the Nineteenth Century, published privately in New York in 1880, was very much an exception with its emphasis on violent Chartism and unrepentant hostility towards Gladstonian Liberalism.

One of the key sources of Chartism for historians of the twentieth century are the national, provincial and Chartist press. Mark Hovell's work The Chartist Movement, published in 1918, was the first attempt to use the major primary sources of Chartism in a scientific manner. He made extensive use of the Northern Star

⁵B. Wilson, The Struggles of an Old Chartist (Halifax, 1887).
 W.J.Linton, Memories (1894).
 T. Frost, Forty Years Recollections (1880).
 W. E. Adams, Memoirs of a Social Atom (1903).
 R. G. Gammage, History of the Chartist Movement (1894: reprinted 1969).

and other Chartist periodicals, although mostly of the pro-Lovett wing of the movement such as The Charter (1839-40), and The Chartist Circular (Glasgow, 1839-41).

The obvious problem faced by historians using the press as a major source is that of making a representative selection of material. The Northern Star was a genuine national paper and contained reports sent in by local reporters in each region. Its circulation reached a peak of 50,000 in 1839 and only fell to under 5000 per week after 1848. Other Chartist newspapers were more local in character and often put forward the views of particular factions.

The provincial press, during the 1830's, was becoming genuinely local in character with their own staffs of reporters and containing full reports of magistrates' hearings separated from the usually hostile editorials. Some provincial papers, however, employed very few staff; thus it could appear that Chartism was inactive in these regions, but this was not necessarily the case. Gross distortion or a "conspiracy of silence" was common, as was the selection of the Chartist activity preferred by sympathetic papers. In Bristol, for example, the tory Felix Farley's Journal called the Chartists "vagabonds," "the veriest scamps" and the "glorious unwashed", while the radical Bristol Mercury eagerly reported a large procession of temperance Chartists carrying slogans such as: "Better eat it than drink it" under a picture of a large loaf. Doubtless some Bristol Chartists were moderate teetotalers whilst

some were "physical-force" men.⁶

Careful cross-reference is therefore necessary when using local papers as sources. Similarly H. O. papers can be very misleading: often the reports of government agents exaggerated Chartist militancy in order to make their work seem essential; some magistrates were either very zealous or scared and wrote very frequently to the Home Office, while others hardly ever wrote; thus giving the impression of low Chartist activity; and finally most material was sent at times of great disturbance or violence and did not deal with the social and cultural aspects of Chartism. In spite of these difficulties, without these sources "we must long be contented with a little knowledge and a modish agnosticism".⁷

The largest source of unused primary material now remains in the Home Office Papers but these have to be handled with great caution. In addition to the wide range of press sources, greater use is now being made of more ephemeral material such as pamphlets, handbills, broadsides and posters as Chartist historiography has become more sophisticated both in technique and the selection of sources during the past twenty years. Handbills, posters and broadsides are least likely to have survived; often only the most militant having been sent to the Home Secretary. Such small

⁶Bristol Mercury, June 1, 1839.
⁶Felix Farley's Bristol Journal Feb. 22, 1840.

⁷E. P. Thompson, The Making of the English Working Class (1963), p.932.

examples only refer to very specific areas at certain times,⁸ and cannot be taken as proof of the general nature of Chartism.

The task of twentieth century historians of Chartism has been both to fit the movement into the context of the history of the labour movement and into its contemporary social, economic and political background. The studies written in the period of the first World War by Hovell, West, Rosenblatt, Slosson and Beer reflected the social reformism of the periods associated with the Fabians and stressed the moral-force side of Chartism. These were generally concerned with establishing the movement as a forerunner of the emerging European social democratic parties. A general picture of Chartism emerged - the major sources used being the Northern Star and the newspaper cuttings and letters of the Place Manuscripts and Papers.

The period since 1939 witnessed the growth of the biographical method of making a much closer examination of Chartism. In a sense this was a step backwards into the study of the "great men" of the movement so beloved by Victorian historians, but it was a useful way of simplifying the process of selection of source material and of avoiding coming to grips with the complexity of Chartism.⁹

The work of Namier had a great impact on Chartist historiography.

⁸D. Thompson, The Early Chartists (1971) pp.1, 175.

⁹D. Williams, John Frost: A Study in Chartism (Cardiff, 1939).
 G. D. H. Cole, Chartist Portraits (1941).
 J. Saville, Ernest Jones: Chartist (1952).
 A. R. Schoyen, The Chartist Challenge. A Portrait of G.J.Harney (1958).
 D. Read and E. Glasgow, Feargus O'Connor: Irishman and Chartist (1961).

In spite of his conservative irrationalism, his empirical methodology and emphasis on detailed analysis strongly influenced the contributors to Chartist Studies in 1959.¹⁰ This work was of pivotal importance and contained the first attempts of detailed analysis of Chartism in various regions and as a "series of responses". Henceforth Chartist historiography became much more sophisticated, both in technique and use of sources.

This thesis will attempt to trace and explain the evolution of Chartist historiography from the years immediately following the demise of the movement to the present. The influence of the writings of the Chartists themselves will be analysed and their impact on historians will be assessed, as will the ways in which selection of sources restricted historians and discouraged sophisticated analysis of the movement. Chartist historians also have to be placed within the historical context of their political and social environment as well as within the context of the evolution of historiographical methodology.

The most important problem to be faced is how Chartist historiography should develop in the future to enable it to attempt an answer to some of the outstanding problems: the social and economic roots of Chartism; its violence, local diversity, and local impact; its total national impact; its ongoing influence on the later labour movement and - most important and difficult of all - the social composition of the movement and the impact of Chartism on the rank-and-file.

¹⁰ Asa Briggs (ed.), Chartist Studies (1959).

The success - or otherwise - of recent historians in answering these and other questions, their techniques in using scattered and often ephemeral sources and developments in historiographical methodology have to be assessed and suggestions made for improvements.

Perhaps the most important historiographical difficulty to be faced by historians of Chartism is the question of cooperation between themselves and social scientists. During the past two decades historians as diverse as C. Hill, H. Trevor-Roper, E. J. Hobsbaum, E. P. Thompson and G. Rudé have made increasing use of the models and analytical framework of sociologists, social anthropologists and social psychologists in order to draw substantial conclusions from incomplete quantitative and qualitative sources. This is particularly relevant for Chartist historiography and its attempts to answer some of the problems outlined above.

Historians such as Hovell, West, Slosson and Beer, as well as Marxists such as Groves and Rothstein,¹¹ made extensive use of the concepts of economics, such as trade cycles, and used them in a rather crude attempt to explain Chartist activity and its fluctuations. Economics was greatly in advance of other social sciences until at least the late 1950's. The social and economic history of the Annales d'Histoire, first published in 1929, laid great emphasis on economic analysis. Social history had remained largely based on Trevelyan's subject matter of customs, manners

¹¹ R. Groves, But We Shall Rise Again (1938);
T. Rothstein, From Chartism to Labourism (1929).

and everyday life or "history with the politics left out".¹² At best, historians such as R. H. Tawney, Barbara Hammond and G. D. H. Cole had written genuine, if mainly impressionistic, re-creations of the lives of working people, often linked with histories of social movements and labour. These latter were not usually related to society in general but studied as abstractions.

The emergence of sociology and social psychology as fully developed social sciences on a par with economics has had a considerable impact on social history in general and promises to have a similar effect on Chartist historiography. At the very least sociological models and concepts such as "generalized beliefs"; "social control"; "role analysis" etc.¹³ can provide a coherent system into which the historian can fit his inadequate data. The historian, however, necessarily lacks the statistical material and controlled experimental conditions of the sociologist. Hobsbawm has pointed out (ibid. p.27) that both sociology and social anthropology are usually abstracted from historical change and that neither have enough useful models or analytical frameworks for the study of long-run historical socio-economic change. He further argued that historians of social history would not be able to advance beyond a combination of suggestive hypothesis and

¹²Quoted by E. J. Hobsbawm "From Social History to the History of Society", Daedalus Vol.100 No.1 (Winter 1971), p.21.

¹³N. Smelser, Theory of Collective Behaviour (London, 1962).

anecdotal illustration unless new techniques were found for handling large quantities of historical data.

Chartism has become a favourite subject for social historians as during such widespread social upheavals there is a better possibility of penetrating the "opaque communities" which were the main centres of Chartism . . . "rarely accessible to parson, policeman or magistrate".¹⁴ If social history in general, and Chartism in particular, is to become the history of society as a whole - linked to its economics, ideologies and social relationships - there is need to analyse individuals and small groups in depth. The key problems in Chartist historiography therefore have to be tackled - those of the active and passive beliefs of the rank-and-file Chartists, the degree in which they were influenced by Chartism and their influence on Chartist development - if Chartist historiography is to advance.

Chartist historiography has to be examined both in terms of the socio-economic and cultural milieu of works on Chartism and the often complex influences of the various schools of historiographical philosophy on Chartist historians. Of crucial importance is an examination of the sources of Chartism and their selection and use by historians. Finally the impact and desirability of social scientific techniques and methodology on Chartist historiography must be analysed and suggestions made pertaining to the direction and content of future scholarship.

¹⁴D. Thompson, p.6.

CHAPTER II

The Chartists' Image of Themselves

Chartist memoirs have to be used with great caution by historians for reasons outlined above (pp.3-4). Only occasionally did they provide telling details of an earlier, pre-Liberal society, as when Thomas Frost wrote with passion about his dreams of a utopian community based on the land.¹

Of first importance to subsequent Chartist historiography was R. G. Gammage's History of the Chartist Movement first published in 1854. As E. P. Thompson has pointed out, the book is "both an essential document of the movement and the text from which all other histories must begin".² Gammage only became an active Chartist after 1840, however, and viewed events from his locality in Northampton. Other defects included a consistent hostility towards Harney, Jones and O'Connor, in contrast to his very favourable treatment of Lovett and Vincent, part of the "moral-force" school of Chartists, and Bronterre O'Brien, the "Chartist school-master" and editor of the Poor Man's Guardian. Perhaps his greatest disservice to Chartism was his negative view of the movement, stressing divisions and personal quarrels, rather than the achievements of the first articulate political movement of an industrialised working class.

At heart Gammage was an old-fashioned radical whose ideology emanated from the French Revolution and the writings of O'Brien.

¹Frost, p.22.

²Gammage (1969 edn.) cover.

He was, however, bitterly class conscious and viewed bourgeois radicals such as Attwood, Duncombe and Sharman Crawford, as doubtful allies. His main fire was reserved for the "scheming Whigs" who were trying to attack the middle class to the aristocratic ruling élite.

In spite of his acceptance of O'Brien's arguments against capitalism in the Poor Man's Guardian and O'Brien's contention that in the long run capital and labour had opposing interests, Gammage believed that the landed aristocracy with its land monopoly was at the root of all evils. The theory of "The Norman Yoke" was very strong in all nineteenth century radical movements and provided a strong link between ex-Chartists and Gladstonian Radicals later in the century.³ The aristocracy were the main enemy as it had monopolized the soil since the "celebrated Norman robber chief" landed in 1066. A moral argument was used to condemn the idling aristocracy for its gross immorality and laziness; thus providing another link with the Gladstonians.

Most Chartist memoir-writers, including Gammage, were strongly influenced by the puritan work ethic. Early in his History he argued that if the monarchy were abolished but "the fundamental relations between capital and labour (were left) on their present footing, you will have accomplished virtually nothing".⁴ By 1852,

³C. Hill "The Norman Yoke", in J. Saville (ed.), Democracy and the Labour Movement (1954).

⁴Gammage (1894 edn. reprinted 1969, with an introduction by John Saville) p.25.

however, Gammage stressed that "no one can hold that right (of private property) more sacred than myself" and that the greatest evil in society was the division between "idlers and workers".⁵ The capitalist was included amongst the latter as he produced employment.

Gammage was a member of the Lovett school of Chartism with its strong beliefs in the moral improvement of its class by education and self-help. Both Lovett and Gammage were incensed by Feargus O'Connor's leadership because of his irrational appeals to his vast audiences which smacked of the swaying of the mob by Wilkes and aristocrats at eighteenth century elections. To Gammage, O'Connor was "an eccentric Irish buffoon, imposing his demagoguery upon the deluded masses by a combination of excessive energy and blarney" (p.65). Both Gammage and Lovett had had no experience of the North and the industrial masses and completely failed to realise the necessity for O'Connor's oratory in building a mass movement. Only a tiny artisan minority had the opportunity to practise self-improvement and references to the "deluded masses" helped perpetuate the myth of the "ignorant populace" led astray by "rabble-rousing" demagogues.

Like later memoir writers, Gammage tried to excuse Chartist violence. Like them he was proud of the movement but also wished to justify their past actions to their new Liberal friends. The political and material progress of the intervening years seemed to prove the efficacy of the peaceable method of protest. Even in

⁵Ibid., p.443.

1854, however, Gammage underplayed the violence of Chartism and condemned its advocates - Harney, Jones and O'Connor. Jones, for example, he dismissed (p.400) as "ambitious and mercenary. He must command the movement, or he would reduce it to nothing". He did, however, sympathise with Richard Marsden of Preston, a member of "the extreme school of Harney and Rider", as his great suffering^x and that of his family led Gammage to ask whether "we (should) blame him for this state of feeling." (p.65).

William Lovett was given a central role in all traditional works on Chartism. Not only had he, with Francis Place's help, drawn up the People's Charter in 1837, but also led the "moral-force" wing of the movement. His autobiography,⁶ published in 1876, was a moving account of the desperate struggles of a Chartist leader and a vivid picture of the richness of artisan culture in the pre-Chartist period. Written between 1840 and 1874, it was intended as a tract for the new post-Chartist generation. It left an overall impression of moral smugness, extolling the virtues of self-help, education and liberalism. His aim was also to contradict anti-Chartist feeling and writing by denouncing violence, and stressing pro-Liberal elements within the movement. Like Gammage, and for similar reasons, Lovett hated O'Connor and the "physical-force" men such as Harney, and did not even mention the London Democratic Association.

Born in Cornwall in 1800, Lovett was forced to move to London

⁶W. Lovett, Life and Struggles of William Lovett (1876: Reprinted with a preface by R. H. Tawney, 1967).

as the rope-making trade was being replaced by chain-making. His later adherence to Samuel Smiles' self-help ideas probably stemmed from his advance from great poverty to the exclusive honourable branch of the Cabinet-Makers' Society. His mentor was Place, with whom he was involved in the Owenite Grand National Consolidated Trades Union in 1834. Lovett was also associated with the unstamped press agitation and learnt much of the new socialist philosophy of Hodgskin and Bray at the London Mechanics' Institute.

O'Connor's brand of leadership was essential to give unity and inspiration to a desperate and despairing industrial working class. Yet Lovett considered him (p.245) "the chief marplot of our movement ... a man who, by his personal conduct, joined to his malignant influence in the Northern Star has been the blight of democracy from the first moment he opened his mouth as its professed advocate. Previous to his notorious career there was something pure and intellectual in our agitation."

The last sentence clearly indicated Lovett's social snobbery, often found among the self-taught. He became very close to Bright's view that the masses would have to prove their moral worth to obtain the vote.

Lovett's involvement in violence at the Bull Ring in Birmingham in 1839 showed the complexity of Chartist attitudes towards violence. He did not become embittered, however, but rather the reverse as in 1840 he and his colleague John Collins published a small book⁷ written in prison. This outlined the setting up of a

⁷W. Lovett and J. Collins, Chartism (1840: reprinted 1969).

National Association of the United Kingdom for Promoting the Political and Social improvement of the People, with penny subscriptions and "Public Halls for the People". The Association wanted to give "knowledge of moral and political economy" which would "enlighten them" in favour of the Charter. The organization was largely a failure due to lack of support; again Lovett appealed only to a tiny minority.

From 1850 to 1877 his main interest was in education. Lovett stood very close to Smiles and his self-help philosophy, but as with other Chartists he never regretted his past. At the end of his life he wrote that: "most of the reforms that have taken place in my day have been won despite the wealthy and titled classes rather than because of them, though they might at least have been made the unwilling instruments for carrying them into effect ... The industrious classes, therefore would do well ... to resolve to do their own work themselves."⁸

Lovett's book, therefore, needed to be treated with far more caution than exercised by historians such as Howell. A similar point applied to Thomas Cooper's Autobiography, published in 1872. Unlike Lovett, Cooper only joined the movement by a sudden conversion when he saw the condition of the stockingers in Leicester in 1841. After a very hard early life, Cooper made himself ill by intensive self-education. By the 1870's he felt that the workers had grown soft. Although in and out of religion Cooper, like Lovett, retained his non-conformist moralism throughout.

⁸Chartism (1969 edn.), p.22.

He decried the pastimes of betting and drinking which had displaced political discussion, and the materialism of the new era. In his younger days he had seen (p.393) men in rags "discussing the great doctrines of political justice - that every grown up, sane man ought to have a vote ... or they were in earnest dispute respecting the teachings of Socialism. Now you will see no such groups in Lancashire."

Lovett and Cooper shared a puritan work ethic and were individualists rather than members of the new industrial classes. Cooper, nevertheless, was proud of working class achievements and only feared that a false sense of security, caused by prosperity, would make the masses lose their moral superiority to their oppressors.

The Autobiography only touched on Chartism for a short period during the early 1840's as Cooper's real interest was in religion, or rather his struggle against unbelief. An ardent O'Connorite and "physical force" Chartist in 1842, he was sent to prison for two years for his part in the "plug-plots". Unconsciously Cooper toned down his violent past while justifying it by descriptions of incredible suffering. Unlike Gammage and Lovett, Cooper did not condemn the strikes of 1842, nor indeed O'Connor, apart from his Land Plan. His violent speeches in Lancashire in August 1842 were made in the language of a revivalist preacher although Cooper stressed his call for the maintenance of law and order. He had probably been carried along by the emotion of the events and had certainly wanted miners in the Potteries to stay out

until the Charter had been granted.⁹

Most Chartist memoirs were written after 1880 and lapses of memory were common. Chartist violence was increasingly played down and Chartism's role as the precursor of liberalism emphasised. Most had a profoundly optimistic outlook on working class improvement - hardly surprising since unsuccessful Chartists would have been unable to write memoirs.

The memoirs of Ben Wilson of Skircoat near Halifax in Yorkshire, and Thomas Frost, the Owenite and small-town draper¹⁰ were meant as tracts for the new generation and were imbued with liberal optimism. Wilson was important as he included detailed descriptions of radical and Chartist activity in the North. The radical tradition had remained unbroken in Yorkshire from 1800 until Chartist times. Violence was widespread and Wilson gave long accounts of drilling and admitted buying a gun in 1839. Like other writers, however, he excused this for the sake of his Liberal friends and made it clear that he had acted only under great pressure as (p.13) "we were fools but ... young people now have no idea of what we had to endure." He might have added that the blessings of free-trade and self-help had made violence unnecessary.

Wilson's main interest was cooperation and the Halifax cooperative Trading Society in particular. Founded in 1849, this was a prime example of the memoir-writers' mixture of Owenite

⁹G. Rudé, The Crowd in History (1963), p.187.

¹⁰B. Wilson, Struggles of an Old Chartist (Halifax, 1887).
T. Frost, Forty Years' Recollections (1880).

socialism and bourgeois liberalism. Temperance was also a key element in Wilson's philosophy. This was allied to internationalism as continental radical refugees were given shelter at Nicholl's Temperance Hotel.

Like all memoir-writers, however, Wilson was loyal to the Six Points. Unlike most, on the other hand, he stressed the impact of O'Connor in the North. The Land Plan was praised as a concept for the future and O'Connor considered (p.14) "a giant in intellect as well as in frame". Ernest Jones' People's Paper was strongly supported in Halifax during the 1850's; an indication that ex-Chartists were still interested in socialism while practising a form of Owenite liberalism. By 1868; however, Wilson was ecstatic over Gladstone's victory: he imagined (p.64) that the Charter would be granted in a very short time.

Thomas Frost was born in Surrey, in Croyden, in 1820. As a centre of agrarian discontent the area probably encouraged Frost's dreams of a utopian community based on the land. He owed much to his father's Painite Jacobinism typical of (p.10) "a little knot of radicals (who) ... later formed the nucleus of the local Liberal Party". Like Lovett and Wilson, Frost was, however, strongly influenced by Owenism. The latter was adjusted to meet Liberal sensitivities: Harmony Hall was presented as having (p.22) "the best conditions for a truly Christian life", although Owen was an atheist, and the latter's call for free love became a plea for divorce. Frost also erroneously believed that Gladstonians had accepted the fundamental tenet of socialism that "man is the creature of circumstances".

Frost minimised Chartist violence but admitted to being involved in drilling during 1842. He was (p.22) "a Chartist and something more" who wanted not only the Charter but "a reconstruction of the entire fabric of society". Similarly in 1848 he had been stunned (p.135) by "the electric effect" of the news from France and was only afraid "of the milk and water reformers who are left behind". Frost also declared (p.148) that government attack would have been met by armed resistance, and that attempts at revolution were being made as "communications (were) passed ... between plotters ... on both sides of St. George's Channel." Further plots in London, after the presentation of the final Chartist Petition on April 10, were also described in some detail.

Nevertheless Frost ended with a tone of moral liberalism and expressed great pleasure that (p.197) "on return (to Croydon) there were more signs of an active and vigorous moral life than my fellow tradesmen had ever been known to exhibit before". Frost, like all the memoir writers, remained loyal to the Charter in spite of his Gladstonianism. He declared that the press claims of false signatures were largely untrue in the case of the Croydon petition; any false ones being the work of idlers or, more likely, men who had tired of petitioning and were ready to rise (p.135).

Thomas Ainge Devyr's The Odd Book of the Nineteenth Century (New York, 1882) was, as suggested by its title, very much an exceptional memoir of Chartism. The author was unrepentant in his total rejection of the moral ethos of liberalism so dominant in other Chartist memoirs. Devyr, an Irishman, was naturally pre-

occupied with the land question. Unlike other ex-Chartists, on escaping to America in 1848 he found much to criticise and devoted half of his book to attacking "corporations, politicians and monopolies in America who form a vast conspiracy against the liberties of the people and the life of the republic".

Historians ignored the book as source material until recent years. This was partly due to its scarcity - it was published privately as no publisher would touch it - but more likely because of its uncompromising militancy and hatred of liberal political economy. To Devyr (p.13), political economy was "enforced under penalty of death by nakedness and hunger... and the Godless, sordid workhouse from which all human sympathy and Divine Justice was bared". Devyr hated industrialism and wanted a society of peasant freeholders, each holding up to forty acres. Above all, he hated the British and advocated force to free Ireland and the English slaves of greedy landlords. The book was written to save America (p.22) from "the depths of that murderous villainy called British Civilisation".

Recent historians, such as D. Thompson (pp.4-5), have verified most of Devyr's observations on Chartist violence in Newcastle in 1839. Although he wrote many years after the events, his account agreed with information in the Home Office Papers and the Letters in the Newcastle Weekly Chronicle in 1889-90 which described the events of the early Chartist period. The book was also important as, apart from Lovett's work, it was the only memoir which dealt with this period and the industrial North.

In a piece entitled "Unwritten History" the events of 1839 at Newcastle were set out. News of John Frost's rebellion at Newport reached the area and placards appeared with the words:- "The hour of British Freedom has struck ! John Frost is in possession of South Wales at the head of 30,000 men." Even the policemen had joined the crowd (p.195). Certainly this was evidence of a general Chartist conspiracy hinted at by Thomas Frost and others, but treated with scepticism by Hovell.¹¹ The news of Frost's capture made it appear that "the Government was impregnable"; their one remaining hope being that Frost would be executed and so initiate a rising. D. Thompson's view (p.3) that the pardoning of Frost prevented a rising would therefore appear substantiated. Devyr was a reporter for the Northern Liberator and he usually "had first communication of every fact and circumstance affecting the movement". His information was therefore fairly reliable. After delegates met at "most considerable towns of the North" to prepare for a simultaneous rising on January 12, and in Newcastle "classes of twelve were formed, each with a leader chosen by ourselves" (p.200), the movement collapsed with the pardon of Frost and Devyr's escape to America to avoid arrest.

Devyr's account of Chartist physical force in the North was substantiated by Frank Peel's book about Yorkshire Chartists.¹² Peel had been too young to have been active during most of the

¹¹ Hovell, pp.175-178.

¹² F. Peel, The Risings of the Luddites, Chartists and Plug-Drawers (First published 1880, 4th edn. 1968: Introduction by E. P. Thompson.)

Chartist period - he was born in 1831 - besides which his father was a capitalist and he himself a typical small-town Liberal Non-conformist. Most of the book was devoted to uncovering "the opaque society" of the period and to E. P. Thompson (p.viii) Peel was "a representative mind within the efflorescence of historical consciousness within his own community".

The unique feature of Peel's work was that his was not a personal recollection of events but the first attempt by an historian to make a close study of a whole provincial working class community. He had a close relationship with the local readers of the Pudsey District Advertiser and the Heckmondwike Herald in which his articles were serialized before publication in book form and often used their recollections as his material. He attempted to penetrate to the rank-and-file and discover their reaction to both Chartism and industrialisation. Peel provided "literary" evidence of the loss of qualitative values during this process: values such as a "gentle" system of social gradations in the old domestic system; the cohesion and kinship of small villages and (p.ix) the lack of "feverish haste and excitement" which made "even idleness eager now".

Peel was also the first serious historian to make use of the oral tradition. Caution was necessary due to memory lapses and a tendency to distort the truth in favour of sources of information, nevertheless E. P. Thompson has verified much of Peel's account of Luddism from published material. Accuracy was more likely in

the case of Chartism, being more recent. In Thompson's view, Peel recorded a secret oral tradition which came to light only after the last episodes of "physical force" Chartism. This violence was a direct link with the Luddites but was far from being mindless or lacking in political motivation.

Peel's account of the events of 1842 (p.334) included a description of "thousands of female turnouts who had struck up the union hymn" which indicated that more than a small minority of the men were motivated by political ideals. The police usually attacked first, in Peel's view, and "did not hesitate to strike (women) with their staves". Rank-and-file politics appeared unsophisticated, however, as many had "coarse grey blankets strapped to their backs", ready to march to London in order to teach the "aristocrats" how completely they were dependent on the lower classes, to whom they had so long denied their just political rights (p.341). This was hardly the reasoned outcry against capitalism claimed by some Marxists.¹³ Nevertheless the Chartists displayed an increasingly class conscious and organised force.

In spite of his sympathetic attitude towards the Chartists, Peel reverted, at the end of his book, to a praise of "constitutional agitation" and free-trade prosperity. After 1848 "a distinct way of life and a traditional culture" (p.349) had passed away.

The final two memoirs written by ex-Chartists were by W. J. Linton,¹⁴ the London woodengraver, journalist, and republican, and

¹³D. Thompson, p.13.

¹⁴W. J. Linton, Memories (1894: reprinted 1970).

W. E. Adams,¹⁵ born in Cheltenham, but having worked for a long period as a journalist on Tyneside. Adams' journalistic training gave him a respect for facts and Saville believed that his memory was reliable. By the 1890's both Linton and Adams had become old-fashioned and conservative even by the standards of contemporary radicalism. Linton's book was written from a London viewpoint and was less useful than that of Adams: much of it was taken up with diverse comments on various contemporary figures and his work in the Peoples' International League.

Linton had emigrated to America in 1866 and, in marked contrast to Devyr, hoped that his book would help promote "good feelings between the two peoples". He did however (p.229) condemn the "anarchical self-seeking" of laissez-faire and called for a true republicanism of equality of rights and the fraternal exercise of religious duty. Linton's views had become almost identical with those of parliamentary Radicals, apart from his criticism of unbridled laissez-faire.

Adams had been merely sixteen in 1848 and he only had had active experience in the international and republican movements of the 1850's and 1860's, and had joined Linton on the latter's English Republic in 1850. Their heroes were the bourgeois revolutionaries such as Mazzini and Kossuth.

Perhaps of greatest value in Adams' book was his description of local Chartists in Cheltenham. His sources were secondhand but fairly reliable as he recalled that his militant grandmother

¹⁵W. E. Adams, Memoirs of a Social Atom (1903: reprinted with an introduction by John Saville, 1968).

praised Cobbett as a hero while "Cobden was just a middle-class advocate". She also had had portraits of John Frost and Larry, the crippled cobbler who "made his appearance every Sunday morning, as regular as clockwork, with a copy of the Northern Star, for the purpose of hearing some member of our household read to him and others Feargus's letter" (pp.163-4). The penetration of Chartist ideas, or at least O'Connor's version, into the rank-and-file of the working class was clearly shown by Adams' description of the care taken not to damage the "almost sacred production" when drying it. In a similar way Cobbett's works were carefully preserved so that "no spot or stain of any sort should reach the pages within" (p.167). The words of both O'Connor and Cobbett had become talismen to rank-and-file Chartists who knew that few others cared about them and who had no prospects of economic gains in a system of laissez-faire capitalism.

In general the Chartist memoirs proved disappointing as sources of Chartism, in spite of providing some valuable insights into the movement. Apart from the books of Devyr and Peel, the memoirs rarely broke out of their framework of Gladstonian Liberalism. Their general tenor was that of sympathy with the Lovett brand of Chartism: hostility to Harney, O'Connor and Jones and outright condemnation of "physical force" and "demagoguery", with little or no attempt at placing these aspects of Chartism within the historical context of contemporary working class culture.

Historians such as Hovell and the Fabians, romantic socialists such as G. D. H. Cole, and more recent historians such as D. Read,

have all accepted the general beliefs and arguments found in the majority of the memoirs. Negative aspects of Chartism have been emphasised:- the divisions of the leaders and rank-and-file; their failure in 1848; the demagoguery of O'Connor and his appeals to the "ignorant unwashed"; the general condemnation of the so-called "lost causes" such as the Land Plan, arming and drilling, and the aspirations of "obsolete" domestic outworkers; and finally the tendency to select aspects of Chartism which reflected the contemporary liberal ethos.

Apart from Devyr and Peel, all the memoir-writers were more anxious to justify their past actions - usually by playing down Chartist violence - than in presenting a national unbiased view of the movement. Adams, for example, played down his connection with Harney's Red Republican in the early 1850's by stressing (p.184) that although "it savoured of blood ... we were Republicans, but not Red Republicans". By 1903 the social implications of Harney's policies had been forgotten or, more likely, toned down.

Nevertheless, if used with sufficient care and understanding, Chartist memoirs provide an invaluable source of insights into the complexity and diversity of Chartist development and, in particular, how individual Chartists became indoctrinated by the dominant liberal ethos. On the other hand Peel's use of the "oral tradition" and his attempt to show rank-and-file reaction, plus occasional glimpses of an earlier pre-liberal radicalism found in other memoirs, can give the historian extremely valuable clues to the true nature of Chartism.

CHAPTER III

The Victorian View of Chartism

Victorian historians largely ignored Chartism and there was something approaching a "conspiracy of silence" about the movement from the publication of Gammage's study in 1854, until the publication of Justin McCarthy's popular history in 1880.¹ Apart from memoirs of Chartists, Victorian historians relied heavily on official sources such as the Annual Register, The Times, parliamentary debates and contemporary novels. Such historians subconsciously agreed with the obvious bias of such sources. This was particularly true of the events of 1848 which, in the Whig view, ended in the inevitable failure and ridicule of the Chartists. Violent revolution was unthinkable as there had already been a "preserving revolution in 1688". Spencer Walpole, for example, sympathised with the communitarianism of Thomas Frost and used his book widely, except for his account of the widespread revolts of 1848 which Walpole ignored in favour of the standard account in the Annual Register.²

The parliamentary debates which took place at the time of the three presentations of the National Petition to the House in 1839, 1842 and 1848 provide both a valuable insight into the reaction of the governing classes to Chartism, and important sources for the historian of the movement.

¹J. McCarthy, A History of Our Own Time (London, 1880) (4 vols.).

²S. Walpole, History of England (6 vols.: 1902-1905), V. p.196.

Thomas Attwood, the former leader of the Birmingham Political Union during the Reform Bill crisis of 1832, presented the first petition in 1839. Attwood personified the concept of middle class cooperation with Chartism. He went so far, in fact, as to claim that the petition originated in Birmingham, although it was drawn up in London early in 1838.³ Attwood went on to stress the loyalty of the working class - obviously to win the sympathy of the House - and similarly emphasised that the masses wished only "to recover those ancient privileges which they believed to form the original and constitutional right of the Commons of England". No threats of violence were made; it was merely pointed out that the Charter was only a means of obtaining "a fair day's wages for a fair day's work", and "representation co-equal with taxation" (pp.224-228). Attwood added, however, that "a social volcano was opening" under the feet of the House (p.231). John Fielden, the wealthy factory owner and Radical, also pointed out that if distress continued "the time was approaching that would shake the stoutest nerves" (p.236).

Russell appeared unmoved and stressed the feeling of the ruling class (and later Victorian historians) that the Chartist movement had been stirred up by agitators such as O'Connor who used "the most violent and revolutionary language - language not exceeded in violence and atrocity in the worst times of the French Revolution - to subvert the laws by force of arms. We owe it to the good sense of the people in general, that they have not listened to such exhortations" (p.236). Russell continued by arguing that "the

³Hansard, third series, XLVIII (July 12, 1839), 224.

great majority of the people do not seek the objects contained in this petition" (p.239). He countered the economic argument of Attwood by pointing to the trade depressions in the democratic United States and argued that universal suffrage would upset the enviable balance enjoyed in England between security and individual liberty and cause a flight of capital.

Russell realised that the Chartists had an articulate case, although he avoided facing the real economic and social problems of the period by resorting to debating points and using veiled threats himself. He showed clearly how remote his class had become from the realities of working class life.

Disraeli also spoke in the debate and appeared more favourable to Chartism than Russell. He argued that the underlying cause of the movement was the fear of an invasion of people's civil rights which "partook in some degree of an economical and in some degree certainly of a political character" (p.247). Disraeli's main point was that the new "false philosophy" of laissez-faire had damaged the ancient principles of the old constitution which preserved the civil rights of the majority by paternalism. He therefore credited the ordinary Chartist with more political motivation than Russell. Like some later historians,⁴ Disraeli associated agitation against the New Poor Law with Chartism, although his attitude was hardly embryonic "Tory Democracy" as more Tories than Whigs voted in favour of the 1834 Act in order to save on rate

⁴D. Thompson, p.11; Hovell, Ch.V.

costs.⁵ Rather, Disraeli represented a small group of romantic, aristocratic young Tories who despised the new capitalists and their philosophy.

The Radicals displayed an ambivalent attitude towards the petition. Joseph Hume, for example, agreed with Russell that Chartism had grown out of events over which the government had little control, but added that deep and general discontent had been generated "by the disappointed expectations of those who had cordially joined with the Government in carrying the Reform Bill".⁶ Hume stressed the political aspects of Chartism as he was basically in sympathy with the Whig's acceptance of the new political economy. Like other Philosophical Radicals of the 1830's, Hume wanted to force the Whigs into their true home with the Tories and reform politics into a clash of the "aristocratic" party versus that of the "People". Drawing on their mentors Bentham and James Mill, the Radicals argued that they did not believe in Cobbett's theories of "natural rights" and the basic goodness of man; the best government would be elected by universal suffrage as this would legislate in the interests of all.⁷ Hume, however, thought the Chartists should "better lay aside the phrase 'Universal Suffrage', and use the phrase 'Extension of Suffrage' in its stead" (p.255). Even Household Suffrage, in Hume's view, would be a useful step

⁵R. K. Webb, Modern England (London, 1969), p.243.

⁶Hansard, third series, XLVIII (July 12, 1839), 252.

⁷J. Hamburger, Intellectuals in Politics: J. S. Mill and the Philosophical Radicals (Boston, 1965) passim.

forward and stop much of the prevailing discontent. Hume showed his basic conservatism when he argued that the Chartists "wished not to affect the interests of the aristocracy, or the stability of the Throne, but they wished to keep the aristocracy in their proper sphere, and to give the Commons of England their due weight and influence" (p.258).

Other Radicals, such as Wakley, also emphasised the economic basis of Chartism. He pointed out the very low wages of agricultural labourers and the indifference and complacency of the ruling class to their sufferings. Wakley pointed to the danger of violence although he claimed "he was not one of those who would lead the people to endeavour to obtain a remedy by the shedding of blood", but thought that "as at present constituted ... (the people) ... might as well address the rock of Gibraltar as the House of Commons" (pp.270-271).

Attwood concluded by underlining the economic inequalities of a society in which out of a savings deposit of 22 millions, "only two millions consisted of deposits of sums under 20l" (p.274). Those in favour of the Charter had also stressed the historical continuity of the Petition and General Johnson had revived Major Cartwright's idea of granting universal suffrage to adult males which would also solve the problems of taxation and the National Debt. On dividing, the petition was rejected by 235 to 46.⁸

The Chartist petition was again presented to the Commons by Thomas Duncombe on May 2, 1842. Duncombe was member for Finsbury

⁸ Hansard, XLIX, 260; Gammage gave figures of 237 to 48 (p.143).

with Wakley; like the latter he was one of the Chartists' greatest friends in the House. As an ex-guard's officer, dandy and son of an aristocratic family, he was no Philosophic Radical; indeed more of a tory radical in the Disraelian mould.⁹ The number of signatures had increased to over three million and the petition included significantly more suggestions for social and economic reforms. The attack on the New Poor Law was one of the major points of difference between Duncombe, Wakley and the Philosophic Radicals such as Hume, Bentham and Mill. Existing monopolies of the suffrage, paper money, machinery or capital, land, public press, religious privileges and many others were to be ended when the people possessed political power.¹⁰ Both the "unconstitutional police force" and the standing army were bitterly attacked: evidence of the Chartist fear of an unprovoked attack by the government providing the largest source of Chartist violence.¹¹

Duncombe repeated Disraeli's arguments of 1839, in which both the new philosophy of laissez faire and industrial capitalism were viewed as an attack on the ancient rights of the people, and he obviously preferred tory paternalism as expressed by the tory Yorkshire Association of the 1780's of which Duncombe's family had been strong members.

⁹T. S. Duncombe, The Life and Letters of Thomas Slingby Duncombe (2 vols.: 1865).

¹⁰Hansard, 3rd series, LXIII (May 3, 1842), p.13-32.

¹¹D. Thompson, p.23.

The reactions of government ministers and members such as Macaulay were fairly predictable. Sir James Graham said that he did not wish to ridicule the petition, but he did not see how its political demands would help to relieve great distress and he was satisfied "that the subversion of all our great institutions must inevitably result from granting of the prayer of the petition and would lead to more suffering" (p.42). Sir John Easthorpe clearly showed the economic basis of the ruling class argument. He believed that "universal suffrage would be fatal to all purposes for which government exists; and for which aristocrats and all other things exist, and that it is utterly incompatible with the very existence of civilisation. I conceive that civilisation rests on the security of property" (pp.46-47).

Easthorpe had repeated most of Macaulay's points of the day before. Although the latter had agreed with the ballot, shorter parliaments, and ending Members' property qualifications but worried over a threat of "a general confiscation of land, of the funds, of railways and machinery" which could only come from "uneducated" men. There could have been no clearer statement of the economic basis of the Chartist threat.¹²

J. A. Roebuck, speaking for the Radical supporters of Chartism, emphasised the peaceful nature of the petition urging the people not to be judged "by the words of the foolish, malignant, cowardly demagogue who had written that petition".¹³ Unlike

¹²Hansard, 3rd series, LXII (May 2, 1842), pp.1383-4.

¹³Hansard, LXIII, p.54.

Europeans, the English had shown that "the distinguishing feature in their character was obedience to the law" (p.55). He believed that "the best government that could be got was that which proceeded from the whole", and stressed the economic aspect of Chartism as he wanted "every man ... would have the proceeds of his own labour, with only so much taken from it as would form his fair share of contribution to the state" (p.57). Owen's influence would appear to have spread far beyond working class circles.

Hume repeated his argument of 1839 that "the surest way to prevent revolution was to listen to and redress the well-grounded complaints of people" (p.64). He would give the vote to males of twenty-one "not tainted with crime" and he had more faith in the working class than the richer classes.

Russell repeated most of his arguments of 1839 as well, including the danger of "throwing the ancient and venerable institutions of the country into question" and the transfer of capital (p.71). He did not agree with Macaulay that universal suffrage would necessarily lead to plunder, but believed that education had not spread enough to stop "popular ferment". Democracy was suitable for America but was too great a shock for the "complicated and intricate" constitution of Britain (p.76).

Peel agreed with Russell that the petition would lead to "anarchy and confusion" and "spoliation of property must necessarily arise". He further believed that "universal suffrage will be incompatible with maintenance of the mixed monarchy under which we live". The petition would not lessen suffering but merely risk

destroying the constitution (p.81).

Duncombe concluded that the petition had been degraded by the House by gross misrepresentations of the sweeping confiscations of property which would result from the petition. He believed that the granting of political rights to the working class would, on the contrary, strengthen the constitution (p.88). Not surprisingly, the petition was lost by 49 votes to 287.

These debates clearly showed both the ambiguity of the position of the Radical allies of Chartism and the economic basis of the ruling class argument. Thomas Carlyle's essay Chartism, published in 1839), showed a similar preoccupation with economic issues and an ambiguous attitude towards Chartism. The essay attacked the whole spirit of laissez faire in a similar but much more violent form than did Disraeli, and Radicals such as Duncombe. Carlyle also took Chartism as a symptom of a very serious crisis in society. To Carlyle Chartism meant "the bitter discontent grown fierce and mad, the wrong condition therefore or the wrong disposition, of the Working Classes of England ... the matter of Chartism is weighty, deep-rooted, far-reaching; did not begin yesterday; will by no means end this day or to-morrow".¹⁴

He then posed the famous "Condition-of-England-Question": "Is the condition of the English working people wrong; so wrong that rational working men cannot, will not, and even should not rest quiet under it ?" (p.167). He attacked Parliament for ignoring the

¹⁴T. Carlyle, Essays: English and other Critical Essays, vol. II, (1915 edn.) pp.165-166.

problem and concentrating on trivia such as the Queen's Bedchamber and "all manner of questions and subjects except the alpha and omega of all !" (p.168), and a chapter was devoted to calling for the Legislature to obtain firm economic evidence in answer to the fundamental question: "Can the labouring man in this England of ours, who is willing to labour, find work, and subsistence by his work" (p.174).

Carlyle went on to specifically attack laissez faire and its epitome - the New Poor Law, based on dogma rather than statistics. He pronounced the new philosophy as "at all fit times to be false, heretical and damnable, if ever aught was !" (p.176). Such a philosophy, in Carlyle's view, would lead to the English working class becoming like the Irish - degraded and destitute.

Like Disraeli, Carlyle called for more government as "the Working Classes cannot any longer go on without government; without being actually guided and governed" (p.147). Again like Disraeli, Carlyle called for the aristocracy to regain their power and will to govern and lead the working classes. Carlyle, however, stressed even more emphatically than did the Tory radicals, the importance of the "right of the ignorant man to be guided by the wiser, to be, gently or forcibly, held in the true course by him" (p.199).

Chartists had also called for more government action to control the economy and O'Connor and O'Brien, rather more than the Lovett School, had realised the inadequacy of political democracy without the economic controls outlined in the 1842 petition. Carlyle also argued that: "Democracy is, by the nature of it, a self-cancelling

business; and gives in the long-run a net result of zero" (p.199). The economic link was clearly perceived by Carlyle as he argued democracy to be "the consummation of No-government and Laissez-faire" (p.200):

Popular education and emigration were Carlyle's solutions for the working class. The former was to "impart the gift of thinking to those who cannot think, ... this, one would imagine, was the first function a government had to set about discharging" (p.228). Emigration was seen by Carlyle as more practical than birth control. The latter, in fact, would lead to an increased proportion of Irish people in the country (p.236). Emigration to the nine-tenths of the earth "yet vacant or tenanted by nomades" (p.237), would be preferable to Benthamite - Malthusian methods of limiting population by slow starvation.

The periodical press of the Chartist period gave a valuable insight into ruling class opinion on Chartism. Blackwood's Edinburgh Magazine was published monthly and gave a high Tory viewpoint. In September 1839 it gave the initial and expected reaction to Chartism. Universal suffrage, brought about "by terror; intimidation and violence", would inevitably lead on to "a universal liberation from taxation and division of property". The movement was composed of "the most ignorant, and most desperate of the kingdom", but such a minority was usually at the root of most revolutions. The main blame was squarely placed on the 1832 agitation "which for party and selfish purposes was so strongly promoted by

the Whigs".¹⁵ The New Poor Law was condemned, however, and "the sway of the middle classes" was seen as having proved more oppressive than even that of the old boroughmongers. No direct criticism of laissez-faire was made, however, although the economic basis of the movement was clearly appreciated: the Chartists "would pillage all the property of the kingdom, and divide the whole possessions of the wealthy classes among themselves" (p.294). The main cause of the economic difficulties of the masses was ascribed to drink as "the magnitude of the sums which a large proportion of these workmen spend upon drink would exceed belief" (p.297).

Blackwood's Magazine also argued, in 1842, that the Anti-Corn Law League conspired to use Chartism to force Peel's government to agree to their policies. The Leaguers were supposed to have shown the Chartists "the breach through which they might storm the citadel, whilst they retired to wait the result!" It was added, however, that: "we are no defenders of Chartism or Chartist doings".¹⁶

The High Tories also had their spokesmen in the provincial press. Felix Farley's Bristol Journal, for example, stressed the common Victorian idea that the "naive working class were being prostituted by clever men" and the nine-tenths of loyal working men should "show English manliness" and speak out against the one-tenth being misled.¹⁷ The Journal concentrated on the "obvious link"

¹⁵Blackwood's Magazine, Vol. XLVI, Sept., 1839, p.289.

¹⁶Blackwood's Magazine, Vol. XLIX, Nov., 1842, p.643.

¹⁷Felix Farley's Bristol Journal, Feb. 17, 1840.

between Owenite socialism, and its resultant confiscation of property, and Chartism: both shared "those dens of infamy, the Socialists' Halls of Science" (Jan. 9, 1842). The same building witnessed a meeting of 600 to 700 Chartists on April 6, 1848. At least 400 of these consisted of "the great unwashed", according to the Journal, and 200 were women and children.

The Journal's Radical rival - the Bristol Mercury - was more favourable towards Chartism. Like the Tories, however, the economic basis of its argument was very clear. The paper argued that "the large accumulation of wealth is not obtained at the expense of any class, nor by any process of privation". In fact greater economic progress would necessarily mean more economic inequality, although total working class wealth would increase. The events of April 10 were condemned as they divided the working class from middle class reformers and brought a danger of a republic. The Chartists had to prove that they were worthy of the vote and not attack the middle class as "ignorant, selfish and unenlightened" as they had done at the Brandon Hill meeting of April 4.¹⁹

Between 1839 and 1842 relations between middle class radicals in the House and the Chartist leadership had become strained. The Philosophic Radical group had broken up and ex-members, such as Hume, were beginning to share John Stuart Mill's doubts about the

¹⁸ Bristol Mercury, April 1, 18

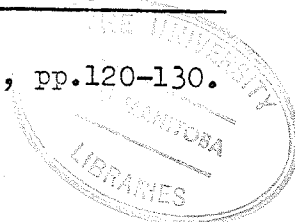
¹⁹ Ibid., April 15, 1848.

immediate concession of universal suffrage. They had always had an ambiguous attitude towards Chartism as it had seemed to be a class movement which would divide the "People"; in addition there was the normal middle class dread of violence. By 1841, for example, Mill had turned from politics to scholarship because of a feeling of futility, and hoped to bring about social regeneration with the aid of publicity.²⁰

The industrial novels well illustrate the ambiguity of all middle class attitudes towards Chartism. Disraeli's Sybil, or The Two Nations published in 1845, amplified many of the points he had made in the House. The main purpose of the book was to attack the Whigs. Laissez-faire was not attacked as strongly nor as specifically as Carlyle had done. Nevertheless, the unified countryside, led by an enlightened aristocracy, was contrasted with the greed and selfishness of the industrial cities. The trade unions, led by the Chartists themselves, were, however, condemned as violent and oppressive. When Dandy Mick was initiated into a trade union, for example, he had to promise to "the assassination of oppressive and tyrannical masters, or the demolition of all mills, works and shops that shall be deemed by us incorrigible",²¹ if required. Eventually "the enlightened aristocrat" Egremont is symbolically united with Sybil, "the daughter of the People", although as Sybil was really a dispossessed aristocrat the marriage marked the uniting of agricultural and industrial properties rather than the rich and the poor.

²⁰G. Himmelfarb, Victorian Minds (New York, 1962), pp.120-130.

²¹Sybil, 1933 edn., p.255.



Mrs. Gaskell's Mary Barton, published in 1848, again clearly demonstrated that the middle class realised that Chartism had an articulate case which had to be answered. After a moving description of conditions in the industrial towns, which was more realistic and imaginative than that of Disraeli, she made John Barton into a murderer. This obviously yet again emphasised the bourgeois dread of violence, although such violence was surprisingly scarce in Chartism. The characteristic solutions to the Chartist question were either magic - as in the case of Sybil's inheritance - or emigration. Mrs. Gaskell chose the latter for Mary Barton. She differed from Carlyle, however, in her hope - expressed in the elder Carson - that capitalists and labour would reach mutual understanding.

Charles Kingsley's Alton Locke, Tailor and Poet, was published in 1850. The confusion evident in the novel was a clear indication of Kingsley's ambivalent attitude towards Chartism and the working class. In his preface to the undergraduates of Cambridge, written in 1862, he praised the young aristocracy for their increasing interest in the welfare of the working man. The upper classes were urged to strengthen their political power by labouring "after that social power, which comes only by virtue and usefulness. Let them make themselves, as the present Sovereign has made herself, morally necessary to the people".²² Kingsley's aim was to avoid the American "tyranny of numbers".

Kingsley sympathetically described the sweated labour conditions

²² Alton Locke (Dent: London, 1910), p.13.

of the clothing trade and the living conditions of its workers amongst "narrow, brawling torrents of filth, and poverty, and sin" (p.95). Alton Locke had the chance to "rise in life" because of his poetic talent and join the middle class. This he refused to do, but agreed to purge his poems of extreme radical sentiments, bitterly regretted this advice given by the Dean, and then accepted the latter's comforting near the end. Further ambivalence was shown towards Malthusian solutions to poverty. Crossthwaite, the Chartist, urged Alton not to have children as they would "swell the numbers of those who are trampling each other down in the struggle for daily bread". He added, however, that he believed there to be "room on English soil for twice the number there is now"; and added that "when we get the Charter we'll prove it" (p.118).

Kingsley stressed throughout that the Charter alone was insufficient - emphasizing, in Alton's words, that "it was within, rather than without, that I needed reform" (p.116). His book, however, provided no specific programme of action for the Christian Socialists to follow; and, like Mary Barton, ended in escape, or emigration to America. Like Carlyle, Kingsley's ultimate faith was in the rule of the enlightened aristocracy personified in the paternalistic Lady Lynedale, rather in the "effeminate shopkeepers" who called "'God save the Queen!'" but meant "'God save our shops!'" (p.311) and Benthamites who called for "'freedom of industry'" which meant "'the despotism of capital'" (p.116).

The response in the House of Commons to the events of April 10, 1848 showed the increasing caution of the bourgeois supporters of Chartism. Only thirteen members voted for the petition,

including only Hume, Col. Thompson, Welmsley, W. S. Crawford and W. J. Fox from the former radical support. These were joined by O'Connell and a few unattached radicals. O'Connor presented the petition; in itself a significant departure from previous reliance on middle class radicals.

The debate on the intended Chartist demonstration on April 7, demonstrated the continuous theme of middle class fear of violence. Bright expressed fear of "collision and disturbance". Sir George Grey declared all meetings illegal if held in "circumstances calculated to impart ... terror and alarm into the minds of Her Majesty's loyal and peaceable subjects."²³ Sir Robert Peel expressed similar sentiments, pointing out that "considering the excited state of the public mind at home ... the (demonstration) ... may be accidentally excited to disturbances of which it is impossible to foresee the consequences" (p.19).

Bright clearly showed his increasingly cautious attitude towards the Chartists during the debate on the Crown and Government Security Bill on April 10, 1848. He had seen a feeling in the country which would "at no distant day, array the great mass of the population who did not possess wealth against that portion by whom it was possessed". Nevertheless, Bright believed that this was not a widespread belief and that a more equal political representation would lead to a more equal distribution of wealth. He also observed that the great fact "which the House must soon boldly look in the face" was "that out of seven grown men in the

²³Hansard, third series, XCVIII (1848), p.6.

United Kingdom, only one man was directly represented in the Commons House of Parliament".²⁴ Bright therefore objected to the Bill as it meant either the government or the people were getting worse.

Bright expressed optimism not yet typical of his class that the ever-increasing expansion of the economy would bring benefits both to capitalists and the working class, and defeat Chartist extremists. During the 1850's, however, Bright showed that, like the Radical supporters of Chartism in the House, he was becoming increasingly cautious about democracy, and advocated the "ancient and noble" English constitution based upon a balance of classes. He admitted that he did not "pretend ... to be a democrat" and was in favour of "such freedom as will give security to people, but not "that freedom that will destroy it".²⁵

Bright was unusual amongst politicians in expressing confidence that all would be well. Russell, for example, repeated his arguments of 1839 and 1842 that universal suffrage would upset the delicate balance of the constitution, endangering the rights of "freeborn Englishmen". Of more importance to Russell, however, was the economic threat of Chartism. He attacked O'Connor's defence of the "labour theory of value" as "more subversive of industry than any of those monopolies or privileges the destruction of which has so recently been effected, or any scheme of political representation

²⁴Ibid., April 10, 1848, p.117.

²⁵A. Briggs, Victorian People (Pelican edn.: 1965), p.209.

which might be said to be defective or unsound".²⁶

Russell's memoirs²⁷ written long after 1848, expressed more confidence than his speeches in the House. Bright's belief, that the majority of the working class could be brought within the capitalist system and English constitution without revolution and destruction of property, had been proved correct. Rather cryptically Russell admitted that he had received two anonymous letters on April 9 "which convinced me that the leaders of the movement ... had renounced any intentions of using political force". Putting the events in their European context, he smugly pointed out that the people of England "did not wish to be instructed by their neighbours in the principle of freedom, and did not envy them either the liberty they had enjoyed under Robespierre or the order which had been established among them by Napoleon the Great".

More than any other contemporary source, The Times gave the strongest possible stress to the Chartist "fiasco" of 1848, reiterated by Victorian and most twentieth century historians. The paper followed an independent line under two great editors, Thomas Barnes and J. T. Delane, but gradually moved towards a position as spokesman for the emerging bourgeois capitalist class during the Chartist period.

²⁶Hansard, third series, CVI (1849), 1294-1305.

²⁷Lord J. Russell, Recollections and Suggestions (Boston, 1875), pp. 206-209.

Unlike the article of April 11, so often quoted, that of April 10 showed The Times was, in reality, not confident that revolution was impossible. A danger existed "in the coincidence and combination; and in the chance which may develop and aggravate the whole". Danger of revolution would occur if the "mob be excited by some sudden sight of blood, or the unadvised rashness of some soldier". Or again, "let a few mischievous foreigners show the way, and the Irish confederates follow the lead ... and no human being can answer for the extent or duration of the mischief once begun". The paper concluded that "the Chartists, in fact, are but tools in the hands of a gang of desperados", linked of course to the Irish who wished "to make as great a hell of this island as they have made of their own".

In contrast, the account in the Annual Register of the events of April 10 was full of praise for the people of England who had exhibited a great example to the Continent of how "the benefits derived from well-tried institutions proves a sure bulwark in the hour of trial against the machinations of conspirators and anarchists". The "tumultuous assemblies" which followed the procession consisted of "the refuse of the crowded city, thieves, pickpockets, and other disorderly characters".²⁸ The main argument was that the false signatures on the petition proved that most workers accepted the status quo, although it was more likely that they were demoralised and tired of petitioning, as Thomas Frost had pointed out (p.135).

²⁸ Annual Register, XC, (1848), pp.124-130.

In the final decades of the nineteenth century, the granting of a wider suffrage and the growth of unskilled unionism, made Chartism appear more relevant to historians who had ignored it for so long in a "conspiracy of silence".

Spencer Walpole devoted fifteen pages to Chartism in his six volume History of England. Besides standard sources such as the Annual Register, he also made use of T. Frost's Recollections and G. J. Holyoake's Life of J. R. Stephens. Walpole, very unusually, sympathised with Owenism - hence the use of Frost's book.

Walpole viewed the cause of Chartism (p.379) as "the misery of the people", just as Halévy was later to call it "the blind revolt of hunger".²⁹ He repeated standard accounts of 1839 and 1842 and although T. Frost had appreciated O'Connor's contribution, Walpole largely ignored the latter, stating (p.384) that he supplied the oratorical power while Lovett "supplied it with brains". The uneducated masses were led astray by designing demagogues, in Walpole's view, and O'Connor "had many of the showing qualities calculated to captivate mobs. Tall, broad, of high lineage, and with a rude eloquence he impressed the uneducated audience" (pp.194-195).

Such historians as Walpole made sincere attempts at impartiality but Von Ranke's methods of critical scholarship were usually beyond their grasp. Instead, they tended to follow Lord Acton's advice and assume that they "must judge, and judge fiercely". Further, most agreed that the Whig concept of liberty

²⁹ E. Halévy, Short History of the English People (1830-41), (1941), p.330.

was of greatest importance, for "progress in the direction organised and assured freedom, is the characteristic fact of Modern History, and its tribute to the theory of Providence".³⁰ The late Victorian historians were usually influenced to a considerable extent by J. R. Green's Short History of the English People and gave a synthesis of national development divided into changes in the mood of society; an obviously subjective and arbitrary division still followed by that doyen of Whig historians, G. M. Trevelyan, in his History of England published in 1926.

Popular historians such as Justin McCarthy kept to Macaulay's methods and selected "those facts and elements in the people's life which bear on the actual progress of events".³¹ Samuel Gardiner's painstaking attempts at impartiality, careful selection and use of primary material never reached a wide public and, like Stubbs, his influence was confined to the universities.

McCarthy was a journalist and wrote for the Liberal Daily News. He was also Irish and a Home Ruler but shared none of Devyr's deep resentment against English bourgeois capitalism. Instead, he repeatedly stressed the stability of English bourgeois society - the defeat of 1848 clearly illustrated England's superiority. Incredible smugness radiated from the book, especially when the Chartist creed was dismissed by McCarthy, boasting that "we have ... outlived the days of political abstraction ... we smile at such

³⁰ Quoted in J. R. Hale (ed.), The Evolution of British Historiography (New York, 1964) p.68.

³¹ Ibid., p.69.

phrases as "the rights of man", "the rights of labour", "the people" ... these have all been deemed unnecessary in these days of free trade".³² There were no "faces in the crowd" to McCarthy as "the disciples of mere discontent ... swerved attentively to the side of leaders or sections who talked loudest and fiercest against the law-makers and concentrated authorities" (p.102). The Chartist threats of force were stressed as an "absurd anachronism" and the notion that "the wage rewarded classes, and they alone" were " 'the people of England' " (p.372), clearly showed the danger of Acton's call for value judgments.

J. Holland Rose's, The Rise of Democracy (London, 1898), very unusually purported to concentrate on social history. The bourgeois bias of the author was clear, however, as Rose favoured Lovett and "moral force" Chartism and value judgments abounded. In 1848, for example, "the general disgrace felt by Chartists, except by such stalwarts as Ernest Jones and Harney, and the collapse of O'Connor's socialist programme, left the ground clear for a far healthier influence; that of Maurice, Kingsley and the school of Christian Socialists ... these two earnest leaders, by voice and pen, had striven to point the way to self help as a safe, if less exciting road, than that of blustering demagogues" (p.44).

The Victorian response to Chartism was complex and many-sided. It was realised that the Chartists had an articulate case to answer but the response of both the aristocratic ruling class and the middle class was very ambivalent. Even the Radical

³² McCarthy, Vol.1, 94.

supporters of Chartism showed the general bourgeois fear of violence and threats to property, of the masses easily swayed by demagogues. The most significant point was that the economic basis of Chartism was realised by most Victorian writers. Their solutions clearly showed their confused and unsystematic response to Chartism and the problems of industrialism in general. This confusion was, of course, closely paralleled by the thinking of most Chartists. Only Carlyle attacked laissez-faire systematically, although his solutions of popular education allied with emigration and the leadership of an enlightened aristocracy were commonly put forward. By the final decades of the century, Bright's unbounded confidence in economic progress, as the key which would bring prosperity for both capitalist and worker, had become general and Chartism seemed an anachronism and violence and revolution unthinkable in England.

CHAPTER IV

The Historiography of Chartism 1900 - 1939

At the beginning of the twentieth century the British tradition of social history was associated with the impressionistic, if literary, methods of Macaulay. This was continued by the latter's disciple G. M. Trevelyan.¹ The work of both was characterised by confidence in their judgments of men and events combined with the assumption that nineteenth century Britain was, in every sense, an improvement on the past. Trevelyan, in particular, humanised the sociological abstractions of the new breed of German economic historians who so influenced Hovell, Tawney and other historians of Chartism writing in this period.

In view of the hold of the "Whig tradition" on British historiography it was inevitable that some of the earliest and best studies of Chartism were by foreign historians such as Edouard Dolléans in France, Max Beer in Germany, and the American disciples of Charles A. Beard - Slosson, Rosenblatt and H. U. Faulkner² - all three of whom worked at Columbia University.

Characteristic of Beard was his mixing of many Marxian theories

¹G. M. Trevelyan, History of England (London, 1926).

²E. Dolléans, Le Chartisme, 1830-48 (2 vols., Paris, 1912-13).
M. Beer, History of Socialism in England (2 vols., London, 1920).
F. F. Rosenblatt "The Chartist Movement in its Social and Economic Aspects"; P. W. Slosson "The Decline of the Chartist Movement"; H. U. Faulkner "Chartism and the Churches";
Columbia University Studies in History, etc. LXXIII. Nos.1-3, (New York, 1916).

of economic determinism and hatred of capitalism, with his admiration of Ruskin's repudiation of laissez-faire on the grounds of its waste of energies. In addition he was concerned with the quality of human life as the test of the economic order. Overlying these influences was a hard positivist historiographical conviction that history was a branch of science; the historian being "a detached investigator, seeking the truth for truth's sake". The duality between the aseptic ideal of scientific inquiry and the social emotionalism of Ruskin, was to be a continued source of difficulty both for Beard and his disciples at Columbia University.³ Chartism was studied by these disciples as it was seen as the first mass movement of an industrialised working class, and was therefore important both for social and economic historians.

In Britain, Mark Hovell's The Chartist Movement, published in Manchester in 1918, was of paramount importance in Chartist historiography. Not only was it the first full narrative of the whole movement, but it was the first study of Chartism based on extensive use of the major primary sources in a scientific manner. Hovell made very wide, if often uncritical, use of the Place Collection of newspaper cuttings and manuscript material relating to the London Working Men's Association and similar bodies, and the Place Manuscripts lodged in the British Museum. In addition to the Northern Star and other pro-Lovett Chartist

³R. Hofstadter, The Progressive Historians (New York, 1968), pp.175-8.

journals, Hovell made wide use of the Home Office Papers, although only between 1839-40, as well as a wide range of secondary sources and memoirs.

Like most Fabians, Hovell was an outsider to rank and file workers: he had risen up the precarious educational ladder of early Edwardian England from humble origins. He became a lecturer in the Workers' Educational Association from 1910 onwards. From 1912 to 1913 he studied under Professor Karl Lamprecht in Germany and had absorbed the latter's admiration for German historical thoroughness and interest in social and economic history. Hovell, however, tempered this admiration with hatred of German materialism: the moralism of the Whig tradition continued well into the twentieth century in British historiography.⁴

Hovell began his book by stating that Chartism "... was a purely working class movement, originating exclusively and drawing its whole following from the industrialised and unpropertied working class which had but recently come into existence" (p.1). He added, however, that clearly "the more prosperous and intelligent organized workers kept aloof from the movement" (p.27). No supporting evidence was offered for this opinion, although it probably originated from the unsubstantiated Webbian view that the trade unions had very little to do with Chartism.⁵

One of the most long-lived generalisations put forward by Hovell was his argument that the handloom-weavers and stockingers

⁴Hovell, op.cit., XXVI-XXXI.

⁵Webb, S., and B., The History of Trade Unionism, 1666-1920 (1894), p.158.

"... were the most ardent of Chartist recruits ... and furnished many 'physical force' men" (p.21). His evidence came from Thomas Cooper's autobiography which, in any case, only referred to the Leicester area. Recent detailed regional research has revealed a very much more complex situation: it was by no means the most destitute who were violent, and certainly not all of O'Connor's followers in the north were domestic outworkers.⁶

Although Hovell's was the most important work on Chartism during the first half of the twentieth century and has greatly influenced Chartist historiography to this day, he could never resolve the duality between scientific empiricism and the Whig tradition of historiography. Evidence of his Whiggish approach included his patronising attitude towards Chartist "failures" such as the Land Plan - O'Connor's attempt to revitalise the movement after 1842 by settling Chartists on self-sufficient smallholdings - and his great hostility to O'Connor in general. The Land Plan in fact kept hope alive after the defeats of 1842 and illustrated the desire of many newly industrialised workers to return to the freedom of self-employment and living close to the land. Hovell dismissed the scheme as follows: "on the incoherences of the system as O'Connor expanded it, it is needless to dwell ... But there is no need to doubt the sincerity of the strange mind which could convince itself ... of the practicability of such a plan" (p.272). Comparative prosperity after 1842 "cut away the very foundations of the Chartist movement"

⁶ D. Thompson, Bulletin of the Society for the Study of Labour History, XX (Spring, 1970), 10-12.

in Hovell's view (p.274); thereby ensuring the doom of the Land Scheme. Hovell had obviously been profoundly affected by the economism of the neo-Marxist historians of Germany and America, but used no direct evidence to support his view.

Hovell condemned O'Connor's "blustery, egotistical, blarneying" and saw him as an "intellectually and morally very unreliable Irishman who probably had never done an honest day's work in his life" (p.67). A great contrast was drawn between the "hero-worship, clap-trap speeches ... and even more reckless oratory" which led to threats of physical force by O'Connor and the honesty of Lovett described (p.32) as "the noblest of them all". Hovell simplified these differences in style and appeal into "moral-force" and "physical force" Chartism: a division which supposedly destroyed the movement.

The role of O'Connor in unifying a diverse movement was ignored by Hovell, as was the former's role of increasing the political education of the masses through the columns of the Northern Star. Above all O'Connor gave hope to the masses remote from the relatively privileged world of the London artisans. This was clearly shown by Adam's description of O'Connor's letter being read to the blind cobbler (pp.163-4) and Ben Wilson's account of how the Star brought Chartists together "to meet at friends' houses ... and talk over political matters" (p.10).

Throughout the book Hovell argued in terms of abstract concepts without any real attempt to use historical imagination. His reading of the Northern Star should have given him some idea

of the impact of Chartism on the rank-and-file. Instead, he argued that the masses were blindly led by O'Connor's demagoguery as "the great Chartist following had ... no policy at all. It followed its leaders into whatsoever blind alleys they might go. The plain Chartist had nothing to contribute to Chartist doctrine" (p.307). The historiographical tradition of the "ignorant mob" led astray by a designing minority was perpetuated, although no supporting evidence was offered.⁷

Tout's conclusion to Hovell's book reduced the final years of Chartism to "ten more weary years". Ernest Jones' People's Paper was his "final journalistic venture" which "dragged on as long as sympathisers were found to subscribe enough money to print it" (pp.291-293). The strong links between Chartists and later labour movements were virtually ignored and the surviving Chartists were considered an anachronism. The movement was viewed by Tout solely within the premises of bourgeois concepts of democracy, individual advancement and the instilling of the moral values of work discipline. The Chartists were brought "within the framework of the constitution" after 1848 and the main virtue of the movement was considered to have been that it "taught elementary lessons of self-discipline and self-government that made the slow development of British democracy possible without danger to the national stability and well-being" (p.311).

Finally, Hovell's most serious mistake was his gross over-

⁷ Compare G. Rudé, The Crowd in History (London, 1963), pp.10-11, 198-203.

simplification of Chartist ideology. It was seen solely in terms of the ideology of the emerging Labour Party; thus only the strands of ideology which led in this direction were emphasised. The close links between many Chartists, such as Ben Wilson, Thomas Frost and Robert Lowery, and liberalism were ignored. Chartist violence was simplistically equated with the syndicalism of 1912-14 and Chartist ideology divided between "a reactionary and a progressive section" (p.306); the former being associated with O'Connor. Detailed studies of O'Connor's writings have shown the relative sophistication of his ideology: he made clear, for example, that his aim in the Land Plan was to "weed out the surplus labour of idle reserve upon which capitalists fall back on as a means of reducing wages",⁸ and not the destruction of industry.

Hovell's basic historiographical approach was closely followed by Julius West in his The History of the Chartist Movement, published in 1920. His sources were very similar to those of Hovell, and he was, if anything, more anxious to emphasise the virtues of British moderate socialism which, he believed, originated with Lovett's moral force brand of Chartism. West had fled from his native Russia in the wake of the Bolshevik rise to power. He came to England in 1918 "full of stories of Bolshevik rascality". West emphasised Chartist ideology more than Hovell, again because of his background, and argued (p.5) that to the "working men who listened to Lovett and O'Connor ideas mattered more than to any

⁸The Labourer (Vol.1), 1847, p.1.

succeeding generation".

The Northern Star was widely used by West who played down its importance, however, as it "gave utmost publicity to O'Connor's speeches and, in fact, to everything that was said on the Radical side, provided, of course, that it emanated from quarters approved by the dictatorial orator (pp.86-7). West offered no supporting evidence and, in fact, Harney - editor of the Star in 1846 - wrote to Engels that: "I must do O.C. the justice to say that he never interferes with what I write in the paper nor does he know what I write until he sees the paper".⁹ Like Hovell, West grossly underestimated the power and influence of the Star in spreading political ideas and in unifying the movement.

West added very little to Hovell's main conclusions and repeatedly followed the Whig historians' dictum that "only those facts and elements in the people's life which bear on the actual progress of events can be admitted into an historical work".¹⁰ The Land Plan was condemned out of hand as reactionary, and the National Association of United Trades for the Protection of Labour which lasted for only three years but succeeded in bringing Chartism and trade unions together was largely ignored, while great emphasis was placed on the Rochdale pioneers of 1844.

West devoted more space to the international aspects of

⁹G. J. Harney to F. Engels (1846), Harney Papers (Amsterdam, 1969), p.241.

¹⁰J. R. Hale, The Evolution of British Historiography (N.Y., 1964), p.69.

Chartism than Hovell - concentrating on the People's League - and also to events after 1848. His major source was the socialist programme of the Convention of May 1851. He realised the diversity of Chartism in the 1850's, however, as he said that Jones' People's Paper included "articles on the class struggle and surplus value (these) alternate with others on limiting the national debt and emigration" (p.270).

Max Beer's History of British Socialism (London, 1920), was written in the same Fabian historiographical tradition as the studies of Hovell and West, although he made greater use of German empiricism and placed less reliance on the Place Papers, employing instead a wider range of the Chartist press as sources. Nevertheless his conclusions were almost identical to Hovell's.

Beer attacked O'Connor for his "passionate outbursts of temper" ... threats of conspiracies and threats of thunderous rhetoric, "sometimes trenchant but always vulgar" (p.11).

Nevertheless some analysis of O'Connor's ideology was attempted - it was seen as "agrarian reform on socialistic lines, the sovereignty of the people, the law of nature, hatred of oligarchy and the absolute necessity for Universal Suffrage" (p.11). But O'Connor's views on the vital question of industrialism were omitted, showing Beer's analysis to be rather shallow and not based on a wide study of O'Connor's writings.

Beer failed to support his contention that "O'Brien remained a socialist to the very last" with references to O'Brien's writings;

similarly no analysis of Harney's writings was made, although he was regarded as a key figure in "the continuity of links between British Chartists and European revolutionaries" due to his close contact with both Marx and Engels (p.23).

The Fabian historiographical interpretation of Chartism pioneered by Hovell continued to dominate studies of Chartism published in Britain until 1939. This was especially true of R. H. Tawney's introduction to a reprint of Lovett's autobiography written in 1920; Barbara Hammond's short Fabian Tract on Lovett, published in 1922; and, finally, H. T. N. Gaitskell's Workers' Educational Association booklet on Chartism, published in 1929. The first two authors showed their bias by their choice of subject, while Gaitskell had been a pupil of G. D. H. Cole at Oxford, although he rejected the latter's Guild Socialism - based on Edwardian romanticism and an odd respect for tory traditionalism - in favour of orthodox Fabianism.¹¹

Tawney was deeply influenced by the Webbian brand of Fabianism based on the assembly of vast quantities of data about social conditions. History was used as a method of supporting social reform - as in the case of the Webbs' study of trade unions and the Hammonds' portraits of the town and village labourers - and this led to unconscious manipulation of historical date to support their case for reform. Tawney used a rhetorical style and although "he was heavily indebted to German scholarship ..., his

¹¹J. Saville and A. Briggs (eds.), Essays in Labour History (London, 1960), p.13.

writings convey, even more than Trevelyan's, a quintessential Englishness".¹²

Tawney argued that "the achievement of Lovett and of (his) organization was to create an I.L.P. which aimed ... first at political democracy".¹³ In fact Lovett differed from the I.L.P. in being deeply suspicious of state interference, preferring, "with the poorest labourer", the individualism that gave him some freedom of choice" (p.37). Tawney followed the Webbian thesis that as "the worst period of economic misery was over by 1850", Chartists "inevitably" turned to trade unions as an alternative (p.XXVII).

Barbara Hammond condemned O'Connor as "unscrupulous", and his Northern Star as a "melancholy tribute to the low intelligence of its readers" (p.14). No clearer example could be found of the scornful, distrusting and elitest attitude of the Fabians towards the masses. Similarly, Gaitskell condemned "the blind alleys, the lost causes",¹⁴ and the losers themselves, who prevented Chartism from evolving into a social democratic party. He aimed to give students in the Workers' Educational Association an historical background to the Labour Party; therefore he virtually ignored "lost causes" such as the Land Plan, the handloom weavers and the pre-industrial roots of Chartism. To Gaitskell the break between the working and middle classes occurred in 1832; the

¹²J. R. Hale, p.76.

¹³Wm. Lovett, Life and Struggles of W. Lovett, (1920 edn.), p.IX.

¹⁴E. P. Thompson, p.13.

"ignorant masses" largely supported the upper class against the French Revolution (p.2).

Contempt was expressed towards O'Connor and his "ignorant" supporters. The Newport Rising of 1839 was dismissed as a product of the "fierce, excitable and almost barbarous temperament of the Welsh miners". A similar attitude was taken towards the outbreaks in 1842: the Webbian myth of complete separation between trade unions and Chartism was repeated as "trade societies as such certainly did not declare for Chartism" (p.85). This, like the whole book, was not supported by detailed footnotes.

The historians of Chartism working at Columbia University in 1916 showed a similar dichotomy of historiographical approach to the British Fabians. They were, however, rather more influenced by the new social science of economics and less by Whig historiography. To Rosenblatt, for example, Chartism was "the first compact form of the class struggle" and as "the bread and fork question" was "the very seed of historical causation", he devoted the first part of his work to an examination of the economic conditions of the masses. He therefore wrote within the framework of Marxist economic determinism.

Rosenblatt argued that the roots of Chartism lay firmly in the opposition to the New Poor Law of 1834. He sought to prove this with economic statistics taken from the 26th and 27th Reports of the Select Committee on the Poor Law Act, 1838; the descriptions of distress from Hansard; and the tables of population and death from the Official Report census no.460, Vol.25.

Unlike Hovell, Rosenblatt stressed the importance of early trade unions and Owenism in providing the roots of Chartism. He argued that as the workers had lost the industrial battle with the collapse of the Grand National Consolidated Trade Union, they turned to trying to capture the government in order to use it against the capitalists. His source was O'Brien's *National Reformer* and reiterated the latter's belief that "from the ruins of trade unionism arose a magnificent tower which, for over a decade, allured the misery-stricken lowly, and illuminated the way for millions of devoted and heroic men and women" (pp.82-3). His only evidence for the non-involvement of Chartism with trade unions after 1834 was, yet again, the Webbian thesis used by Hovell.

Rosenblatt further showed his greater detachment from the current British political scene by indicating an unusual sympathy towards O'Connor. While saying (p.108) that Lovett "lacked both intellect and plausibility", he remarked that O'Connor "had a deep passion for freedom" and often proved "his genuine devotion to the cause". Unfortunately Rosenblatt failed to expand on O'Connor's appeal to the mass of Chartists and his role in giving unity to Chartism. O'Connor was also criticised as his Land Plan was not socialist.

Slosson's continuation of Rosenblatt's study gave a valuable new emphasis on economic factors underlying the decline of Chartism after 1842. Unfortunately, like the other historians of the period, his sources were inadequate to support his generalisations. He, for example, saw 1832 as marking the final division

between middle and working class ideology, ignoring, like Hovell, the complex interaction between the two.

Slosson relied very largely on indirect evidence such as the reports of several Select Committees set up to inquire into various economic issues during the 1840's. These reports often only covered one group at a certain time; thus many areas were not covered at all and the structure of the industry being investigated was rarely studied. In any case most of these investigations focused on the physical and moral condition of women and children; the men having to be left to the mercies of the free market.¹⁵

Slosson's aim was to show how the three heights of Chartist activity - in 1839, 1842 and 1848 - coincided with the periods of greatest industrial depression and the highest rates of death and emigration; thus he concluded that the major cause of Chartism was economic. This analysis was excessively simplistic as it failed to take into account "imponderable" elements in the workers' response to industrialisation, such as attitudes towards work discipline, intensity of labour, loss of freedom and dignity of labour.

Unfortunately, in spite of the useful nature of his study, Slosson tended to repeat the generalisations and negative views of the Fabians, using the same sources. For the events of 1848 Slosson used Gammage, the Annual Register and Thomas Frost. In the latter case Slosson omitted the parts on violent outbreaks as had Hovell and concluded that Chartism had been shown to have been

¹⁵E. P. Thompson and Eileen Yeo, The Unknown Mayhew (London, 1971), p.57.

"in a weaker state than before". The violence had been the actions of "a small minority" with "no such force of popular approval as the Monmouth insurrection in 1839 or the political strike of 1842" (pp.93-94).

Slosson was important as he was one of the first historians to enter the "standard-of-living" controversy - unusually for a neo-Marxist historian on the "optimistic" side. He argued (p.129) that "in most grades of factory labor and manufacture the general tendency was toward improvement" - but his evidence was perhaps too slight: the Parliamentary Paper 1887 (C.5172) (XXXIX), 273, which compared wages in 1839 and 1849 in the cotton factories of Manchester, finding only the weavers to have been worse off. This survey was, of course, too local and took no account of prices, as well as having been carried out long after the period in question. Nevertheless Slosson had made a significant initiative in social and economic historiography.

H. U. Faulkner's Chartism and the Churches - the third work in the series by historians of Columbia University - was a new departure in Chartist historiography. Perhaps influenced by Weber's religious sociology, linked with Marxist economism, Faulkner attempted to study a particular aspect of Chartism in order to go beyond the generalisations of previous historians. Hovell, for example, had baldly stated (p.203) that "Christian Chartism did not have deep roots".

In Faulkner's opinion the rank-and-file Chartists were, at best, indifferent to religion. This was very difficult to prove -

and has become one of the key historiographical problems of Chartism - but Faulkner used the Chartist press such as Linton's English Republic (1851-55) and McDouall's Chartist and Republican Journal even though such sources reflected the views of their editors rather more than the ranks. Linton, for example, was more interested in poetry and republicanism than Chartism by the 1850's.¹⁶

Faulkner quoted the attitudes of Chartist leaders and tended to ascribe them to the rank-and-file, but unlike the Victorian historians who emphasised the work of only great men, he believed that the masses could think for themselves and were not merely led blindly. Unfortunately he was not able to use sufficient sources nor carry out detailed local research to modify his generalisations. To support his view that there was an "inalienable connection between political radicalism and infidelity or indifference to religion (p.16), he pointed out that Holyoake was an Owenite; Cooper had broken with the Methodists until the 1850's; Harney and Jones were socialistic secularists - Harney in particular being described by Kingsley as part of the smoke of the pit.¹⁷ Further indirect evidence was cited from the Rev. Henry Solly's book James Woodford - Carpenter, published in 1881. This was a biased source, however, as Solly had been forced out of the Unitarian Church because of his Chartist sympathies.

¹⁶ Hovell, p.299.

¹⁷ A. R. Schoyen, p.219.

Faulkner's evidence did not support his argument, therefore, in the case of the rank-and-file.

Faulkner pioneered the study of subjects such as the Scottish Christian Chartist, the Rev. Patrick Brewster, using the local press, such as the Chartist Circular published in Glasgow 1839-41, and figures such as Vincent and Robert Lowery, who had played important roles in Temperance Chartism. Alex Wilson's study¹⁸ has shown Christian Chartism to have been more widely practised than Faulkner suggested, and it has been argued that in Cornwall¹⁹ Temperance Chartists often opposed "official" delegates and were later absorbed into radical liberalism. Nevertheless Faulkner identified aspects of Chartism previously totally neglected.

Faulkner was more successful when explaining the attitudes of the Churches towards Chartism; sources were plentiful and included the Christian Observer and Christian Guardian. Most were deeply hostile, such as the Rev. Jenkins who likened Chartism to the "revolt of the angels" (p.59). Similarly the Methodist Conference Minutes showed that the Wesleyan Church "hated democracy as much as it hated sin" (p.347). In the case of the Primitive Methodists, however, official sources were scarcer and Faulkner only tentatively concluded that their attitude was more favourable -

¹⁸ A. Wilson, The Chartist Movement in Scotland (Manchester, 1970).

¹⁹ J. G. Rule, Chartism in Cornwall, Bulletin of the Society for the Study of Labour History. 1968, No.4.

a conclusion confirmed by detailed research by Wearmouth.²⁰

The French historian Elie Halévy included a chapter on Chartism in volume III of his History of the English People in the Nineteenth Century - The Triumph of Reform, 1830-1841, published in 1923, translated in 1927. His sources were largely those of Hovell to whom his debt was obvious. The terms moral and physical force were used to describe the two factions in the movement (p.301), although unlike Hovell Halévy placed some emphasis on violence in the North in 1839 (p.311). He repeated Hovell's contention that most Chartists were either miners or silkweavers and very few were factory workers (p.321).

Halévy added very little to Fabian orthodoxy; in fact he simply reinforced it. The simplistic economism of the Columbian "school" of historians was repeated: Chartism was seen (p.323) as "the blind revolt of hunger". Even more questionable were Halévy's unproven assertion that "the English are not a people of revolutionary temper, quick to take up with any theory which provides a justification for their destructive passions. The mass meetings which were attended by vast crowds were amazingly peaceful" (pp.323-24). His main justification for this view was the peaceful nature of 1848 in England compared to the Continent: the Chartists were "a minority ... demonstrating against the overwhelming majority of the nation (p.345).

The historians of the Interwar years shared many aspects of

²⁰ R. W. Wearmouth, Methodism and Working Class Movements 1800-50 (London, 1947).

their historiographical approach to Chartism. Much valuable work had been accomplished: the basic sources of Chartism had been used in a systematic manner and a clear picture of the movement in general had emerged. The influence of developing social sciences had been muted, however, and only economics was given any prominence. Similarly the impact of Marxism had been slight, particularly in Britain. Here the Left had become involved in the political system, unlike on the Continent, and basically accepted the capitalist system. Tawney and Cole led the Left among historians and not the Marxists who were forced by the prevalent factual and anti-intellectual approach of Namier, J. B. Bury and H. Butterfield to provide a mountain of foot-notes with each theoretical point.²¹

The studies by Rothstein and Groves were, therefore, the only major Marxist works published in England during these years. Significantly, Rothstein had been born at Kouno, Russia, and had joined Hyndman's Social Democratic Federation after arriving in Britain in 1891. He had supported the Bolsheviks and returned to Russia in 1920 and was not allowed to return to Britain. He served the new régime in Russia; thus he doubtless began to view British labour in Bolshevik terms.

Rothstein's From Chartism to Labourism (New York, 1929) was frankly a study whose value lay "not so much in facts quoted, as in their analysis and interpretation" (p.66). An example of his technique was his description of the 1842 factory lock-outs

²¹G. Stedman Jones, "The Pathology of English History", New Left Review No.46, Nov.-Dec. 1967, pp.36-38.

which he concluded were an Anti-Corn Law League plot. Such a theory would fit the Marxist thesis of a growth in bourgeois class-consciousness, which would be used to frighten the aristocracy with workers' power into granting free trade. Quoting from direct evidence, Donald Read has made use of George Wilson's papers to show that Bright and other Leaguers actively encouraged such a conspiracy.²²

Rothstein studied basic Chartist sources such as the Northern Star and those exploited by Hovell and others as well as less well-known sources such as the London Democrat - organ of Harney's London Democratic Association - and the Poor Man's Guardian edited by Bronterre O'Brien. Unfortunately he took insufficient care to conclusively prove his analyses. The L.D.A., for example, was praised for anticipating Marx and as "the only organization to connect the ultimate aim of the economic emancipation of the working class with political class action" (p.50). Unfortunately the strong Jacobin flavour of the L.D.A. was not mentioned and no attempt was made to describe its size, composition and influence.

Again, in his description of O'Brien as a great influence on Marx, Rothstein carefully selected extracts from the Poor Man's Guardian such as the following: "as long as labour's existence depends on the capital of others, so long must he (the worker) continue a pauper and a slave ... there is but one remedy. It is to upset the whole system".²³ It was also argued that the writings

²²D. Read, Cobden and Bright (London, 1967), pp.48 and 50.

²³P.M.G., Oct.4, 1834; quoted Rothstein, p.116.

of O'Brien "were read by the proletarian multitudes". No supporting evidence was given; indeed the statement appeared to contradict Rothstein's earlier view that London was not a proletarian centre like the industrial north (pp.49-50). O'Brien's biographer has argued that O'Brien was very much part of the British tradition of pragmatic socialism. This would appear to be true if O'Brien's full career is studied; his National Reform League in the 1850's advocated compensation for land nationalisation, rather than confiscation.²⁴

Rothstein minimized Chartist violence and argued that either it was due to a conspiracy of the bourgeoisie, as in 1842, or that the workers had been "bought off" by factory acts. Following Marx, he argued that the working class was not sufficiently developed to defeat the dominance of the bourgeoisie; thus O'Connor's tactics were right in 1848 and Rothstein repeated the standard accounts of events. It is now clear, however, that the ruling class had an underlying fear of Chartism in 1848 before April 10, and were determined to smash it.

Rothstein, like Fabian historians, used a simplistic correlation between economic trends and the success of Chartism. After 1848, in his view, Chartism entered "the Babylonian captivity of working class leaders", by the bourgeoisie at the zenith of their economic power (p.88). He used the figures given in A. L. Bowley's "History of Wages in the 19th Century" in the Journal of the Statistical Society (March, 1901) as proof of a rising living standard. These

²⁴A. Plummer, Bronterre (London, 1971), pp.194-199.

showed a rising average wage after 1848, but Rothstein did not question their method of compilation, nor the fact that a rising average could conceal much poverty.

Of great importance in Rothstein's study was the section devoted to the international aspect of Chartism after 1850. This consisted of sixty pages which, in contrast to West, ignored the moderate "People's League" in favour of Harney's "Fraternal Democrats". Rothstein used carefully selected excerpts from the Red Republican and the Democratic Review to prove Harney to be a follower of Marx. Schoyen pointed out, however, that Harney remained faithful to the Babeuvian Communism of his youth. The Democratic Review being a "forum for socialist thought, rather than a propagator of one particular socialist view".²⁵ Similarly Rothstein discontinued quoting from Jones' People's Paper after 1856 when the latter entered his final liberal phase.

Reg Groves' But We Shall Rise Again (London, 1938), was the other major Marxist interpretation of Chartism of this period. Groves was a life-long member of the British Communist Party and his aim was frankly to use Chartism as a means of exhorting workers to renew their efforts and not repeat Chartist mistakes. No footnotes were used but his sources were very similar to those of Rothstein, with the addition of the Northern Liberator, a minor Newcastle paper published between 1837 and 1840, upholding a strong physical force viewpoint.

Groves wanted to prove that Chartism "was the first mass

²⁵Schoyen, pp.144, 186.

political movement of labour, engaged in a bitter and bloody fight for class power" (p.2). He was only able to use indirect evidence, and this was selected with even more care than by either Rothstein or the Fabians. Only detailed regional analysis could prove, for example, his claim (p.5) that "the handloom weavers were doomed and were therefore a drag on the movement". More recently it has been shown that the weavers were ardent Chartists and very militant in Manchester.²⁶

Unlike Rothstein, Groves argued (p.10) that the masses were ready to revolt but were betrayed by their leaders. His language was very flamboyant and designed to exhort the contemporary working class into making a new effort. The new towns became "crucibles of revolution" out of which "came white-hot the weapon of working class struggle ... a passionate readiness for revolutionary struggle" (p.10).

Groves followed the Fabian and Whig historians by roundly condemning any Chartist who did not act according to his expectations. O'Brien, for example, he criticised for jibbing "at following the logical path of revolutionary struggle induced by Chartist demands" (pp.25-26). He also blamed O'Connor for Chartist failure, although giving him credit for his command over the masses.

In contrast to Rothstein, and indeed all previous historians, Groves believed that revolution had been possible in 1848 if Chartist leaders had not betrayed the masses. His major source

²⁶ D. Read, "Chartism in Manchester" in Chartist Studies (1959), p.48.

was Thomas Frost: he carefully selected those parts describing the various risings after April 10, ignoring the ridicule of the actual day. Frost, however, only believed violence was planned in self-defence; many plots being instigated by agent provocateurs (p.149).

Groves ended by drawing a parallel between Ramsey MacDonald's "betrayal" during "a period of capitalist decline" and that of the Chartist leaders. He believed that revolution was possible in 1938 and concluded that "we can never establish our debt to the Chartists: we can repay it only by bringing their work to fruition" (pp.255-6).

The interwar period had witnessed the domination of Fabian historiography amongst writers on Chartism. Very little progress had been made beyond Hovell's work and the influence of the social sciences and indeed Namier was very limited. Certainly, no real attempt had been made to assess the influence of Chartism upon the masses and rank-and-file reaction to the movement, beyond the obvious examples of demonstrations at periods of crisis. There was now an obvious need to study Chartism beyond the broad generalizations of Hovell.

CHAPTER VThe Age of Biography: 1938 - 1958.

Much of Victorian historiography had concentrated on the great men of the past rather than the masses. This method well suited the dominant philosophy of liberal individualism and provided a means by which historians could make use of sufficient source material to exercise scientific scholarship. Concepts later used by social and economic historians, such as culture, class and mode of production, were not empirically verifiable.

British historians of this period were very little affected by European progress in the social sciences, pioneered by Weber, Freud and Sorel. By 1939 several general histories of Chartism had appeared which, although laying a sound foundation of basic scholarship, necessarily over-generalized and added little to Hovell's work. Historians now had the choice of either concentrating on regional Chartism, perhaps using techniques borrowed from infant social sciences, or studying individual Chartists in order to reach beyond previous over-simplifications.

The biographical form had the advantage of providing the historian with at least some sources in the form of written memoirs or letters. In the case of the majority of Chartists, however, their biographies had to be carefully pieced together from writing by and about the subjects in newspapers, entailing much labour and involving the difficult question of representative selection. A full study of all aspects of the subject's

life, firmly placed within the historical context of the period and the social, economic and political background of his region, is necessary if a narrow concentration on an individual Chartist is to be avoided.

David Williams successfully used this technique in his John Frost: A Study in Chartism (Cardiff, 1939). This was the first attempt at a full-length biography of a Chartist leader. Frost was a middle-aged, life-long radical who had lost his position as a magistrate in Newport, Monmouthshire, because of his Chartist sympathies. His position as a local radical leader with strong community links forced him into heading the Newport rebellion, against his will, in 1839.

Williams quite successfully related Frost's career to the regional economic and social structure of South Wales; thus his work was the first to bring out the rich diversity of Chartism by local study. He was fortunate in having some personal papers relating to Frost, although far fewer than usual for political biographers. The bulk of his sources came from the reports in the Home Office papers and in the Public Record Office. These were largely reports of trials of rioters and would thus emphasise violent aspects of events. Williams also used various pamphlets and ephemera, plus a wide range of secondary sources; mostly written long after the event by usually hostile authors.

Williams necessarily reinforced the Welsh Chartists' reputation for violence by his concentration on the Newport Rising. The role of the violent "Scotch Cattle" was stressed amongst the

Welsh trade unions, although Williams added (p.2) that as wages were higher in South Wales, the miners were more likely to listen "to a purely political appeal, such as that of Chartism". This comment reflected the unsophisticated interpretation of Marxism general amongst British historians of the period.

Detailed local research into Welsh Chartism,¹ using a wide range of the Chartist and provincial press, as well as Williams' sources, has discovered that each area in the South Wales coal-field had a different economic and social structure; violence being largely confined to Blackwood and district. A study of the sociological structure of the area has shown the widespread influence of Methodism and temperance alongside the incorporation of Chartism into the social life of the area.

In 1941, G. D. H. Cole published a selection of short biographies of Chartists in his Chartist Portraits. His own political philosophy - Fabianism mixed with romanticism - and the availability of secondary sources largely determined his choice of subjects. Both the large scope of the work and the lack of personal papers as sources severely limited the usefulness of Cole's book. Nevertheless the work brought together short biographies of widely varied Chartist leaders, indicating the complexity of Chartism.

Cole provided a summary of previous work on Chartist leaders which had been buried in general histories. Cole found, however,

¹O. R. Ashton, "Chartism in Mid-Wales", M.A., University of Wales, 1971.

that very little had been written about O'Connor - an obvious reflection of historians' bias - and was forced into using Thomas Frost's memoirs as his major source which should have been treated with more caution.

In his study of George Julian Harney, Cole had only newspaper sources available. His research was not extensive and he repeated most of Hovell's ill-founded generalizations. In Cole's view the recruits for Harney's London Democratic Association came from the poorest weavers, dockers and Irish labourers. It was, to Hovell, "a violent and reckless body" (p.126) and Gammage declared weavers to be its main supporters. Cole added dockers and the Irish without citing any source. The historian of the L.D.A., after extensive searching of the Home Office papers, could find only one labourer mentioned, and very few Irish members as O'Connell was the bête-noire of the L.D.A.²

Cole's treatment of O'Brien clearly showed his failure to place Chartist leaders fully into their historical context. He praised O'Brien for believing that political power was necessary before social revolution, but concentrated on his life before 1841 when he was writing for the Poor Man's Guardian. After this date he "could make no sustained effort" (p.265) and Cole criticised O'Brien for falling between the two stools of outdated agrarian democracy and living too soon to rouse the people against monopoly capitalism. Recent research has indicated the importance of O'Brien's later writings in showing his contribution to British

² A. J. Bennett, "A Study of the London Democratic Association", M.A.Thesis, University of Sussex, 1968.

pragmatic socialism clearly visible in the programme of the National Reform League which advocated land nationalization alongside the inviolability of private property.³

Similarly Cole called Ernest Jones "the first English Marxist", although he concentrated on Jones' writings between 1848 and 1858 which gave an unrepresentative impression of Jones and the development of his ideology. Cole virtually ignored Jones' diary as it referred to his early years as an "idle aristocrat" and his contributions to The Labourer in which he advocated the "lost cause" of O'Connor's Land Scheme. Jones' poems attacked the landowners as the main enemy of the workers rather than the capitalists. In 1847, for example, Jones stressed the need for factory slaves to return to the land in a poem entitled "The Factory Town".⁴ After 1858 Jones increasingly reverted to his radical reforms of 1847, when his speeches at the Halifax election in 1868 would not have been out of place in the programme of any mid-Victorian radical.⁵ Cole argued, however, that Jones "had in no wise modified his essentially socialist views" (p.353).

Cole's historiographical technique was therefore very similar to that of Hovell and the Fabians with perhaps even more elements of Whig-style selectivity and moral judgement, combined with a similar reluctance to employ social scientific methods of analysing sources.

³A. Plummer, Bronterre (London, 1971), pp.194-199.

⁴The Labourer, Vol.I, 1847.

⁵J. Saville, Ernest Jones: Chartist (London, 1952), pp.81-2, 95-7.

The immediate post-war years were a period of increasing interest in social and economic history. The great Labour Party victory of 1945 appeared to mark the final and conclusive domination of politics and society by the common man. It was obviously necessary, therefore, for historians to study their masters. The determination of the Labour government to move towards a planned economy rather than return to pre-war capitalism, associated with unemployment and poverty, increased interest amongst economists in the historical evolution of British socialism, as well as developing British historians' interest in social and economic history.

The Annales: économies, sociétés civilisations, first published in 1929 and founded by Marc Bloch and Lucien Febvre, pioneered the use of social sciences in the study of social history and its influence increased during the war years. Hobsbawm has pointed out,⁶ however, that their aim was to produce a complete history of society rather than just social history and further that, unlike economic history, social history cannot be studied in isolation being inextricably linked to economics, philosophy and political structure. Not until 1958 was the first journal published which specialised in social history - Comparative Studies in Society and History - and in Britain historians were more influenced by Sir Lewis Namier than by social sciences.

Historians of Chartism, particularly after 1945, attempted to use Namier's techniques of studying élite groups and individuals

⁶Hobsbawm "From Social History to the History of Society", pp.25-26.

- their psychology and motivation - rather than Chartism's social and economic roots, social composition, regional diversity and national significance. Unfortunately, while Namier's techniques were eminently suitable for the study of political history with its wealth of sources, the production of a mass of small Chartist biographies would be neither possible nor very productive. Namier's techniques were those of a conservative who denied the possibility of the continuity and cohesion of movements such as Chartism and indeed some historians have argued⁷ that Namier's empirical methods and anti-intellectual approach owed much to Nietzsche. It has been further argued by Jones that Namierization could lead to antiquarianism and an excuse not to use social scientific techniques. Instead of progressing, British historians were trapped in "antique liberal individualism" (p.42) but without the idea of progress, the latter being tainted with the label "historicism".

John Saville's Ernest Jones: Chartist, published in 1952, clearly indicated these historiographical influences. Saville was a Marxist anxious to prove that Jones was Marx's first important English disciple, in an effort to show the continuity of the British Marxist tradition and thus its congruity with modern British socialism. By 1952, disillusionment with the Labour Party and the Tory victory in 1951 had grown amongst socialist intellectuals, making them anxious to break away from the traditional Fabian approach. In the absence of the techniques of

⁷G. Stedman Jones, "The Pathology of English History, New Left Review No.46 (Nov.-Dec. 1967), pp.36-38.

the social sciences, the Namierite biographical approach seemed useful, especially when linked to Marxian historicism or the liberal concept of progress.

After an introductory biography of eighty pages, Saville selected a variety of Jones' speeches and writings during the period after 1848 - his most radical period. Like Cole, Saville also ignored his writings after 1858 when Jones entered his Liberal phase. Saville replaced Namier's psycho-analysis and empiricism with Marxist historicism of an unsophisticated nature and failed to bring out the full complexity of the evolution of Jones' ideology, placing him in his historical context. The importance of the influence of Jones' early romanticism on his Chartist poetry and support of the Land Scheme was largely ignored. To Saville (p.24) the latter was "unquestionably reactionary" and "distracted the attention of the movement from the realities of a society which was being rapidly industrialised". In fact O'Connor's views were far more sophisticated than usually supposed and doubtless shared by Jones.⁸ The latter wrote many poems in favour of workers giving up the slavery of the factory and becoming independent smallholders. The Irish famine was obviously in his mind when he called for "repeal of the union; the land; and the Charter" and told the "factory martyr" and farming slave that "to keep the land the best way was to gain the Charter".⁹

Saville assumed that because Jones joined Harney's Fraternal

⁸ Above, 62.

⁹ The Labourer, Vol.1, 1847.

Democrats and met Marx and Engels his political education was largely completed by them. Schoyen has pointed out, however, that during the 1850's Marx and Engels were often viewed as just another faction of the international socialist movement, often arrogant and with no mass following.¹⁰ Both Jones and Harney also supported many bourgeois revolutionaries such as Kossuth and Mazzini.

Saville portrayed Jones' conversion to socialism as "progress ... evidenced in his speeches and writings" which were carefully selected to stress any emphasis on socialism or physical force. On the land question, for example, Saville did not provide an extract from The Labourer which advocated that smallholdings should be privately owned, but rather from the People's Paper, June 5, 1852, in which Jones advocated land nationalization. Saville also failed to indicate that in spite of this, Jones also suggested that (p.156) "the state should buy (the land) up - not to confiscate or to seize, but to buy at a fair price".

Saville argued that Jones was the first disciple of Marx "with any claim to mass influence", an assertion which he could produce no evidence to substantiate. Certainly the circulation of the People's Paper was very small (never above 3,000 according to Saville, 51, n.4). Saville admitted that the factory proletariat was not fully developed until the end of the century, but he condemned the Labour Parliament of 1854 as "wildly unpractical and utopian" (p.54) for completely ignoring the importance of an

¹⁰A. R. Schoyen, 205, n.12.

organized trade union movement. In all Jones' "mass influence" would appear to have remained small.

Saville's major source for Jones' career after 1852 was the People's Paper. The limitation of this source was that during events such as the Crimean War, very little space was given to either Chartism or trade unionism and it was not possible, therefore, to determine whether such activities had ceased or were merely not reported. Saville also minimised the importance of Jones' "decline" into bourgeois radicalism between 1858 and 1869, devoting only twelve pages in his introduction to this period and one extract in the documentary section. The People's Paper had been sold in 1858 and sources were more scattered. By 1867 Jones showed the deep influence of tory romanticism and O'Connor in a pamphlet which called for a return to smallholdings "as the only safeguard against the assaults of capital" (p.230).

Saville's biography had provided a valuable but incomplete portrait of a leading Chartist and the evolution of his ideology. Jones' complex amalgam of tory romanticism, Spencianism, Owenism, O'Brienism and Marxism combined with the prevailing bourgeois liberalism was not brought out, and Saville had failed to provide much insight into Jones' psychological motivation.

A. R. Schoyen's biography of George Julian Harney - The Chartist Challenge (1958) - continued the biographical approach to Chartist historiography. Schoyen wrote from a strongly left wing, although not Marxist, position. Schoyen had to use a large degree of historical imagination to portray Harney's early

life as he lacked any diaries or letters which Saville had utilised. The rest of Harney's career was pieced together from newspaper and periodical sources and Schoyen attempted more Namierite psycho-analysis of his subject than did Saville.

Schoyen's basic approach was empirical but within a framework of the traditional liberal and Fabian belief in the progressive evolution of a social democratic party in Britain, combined with moralism. Schoyen's major source for Harney's early career was the London Democrat, the organ of the Jacobin and revolutionary rival to Lovett's London Working Men's Association - the London Democratic Association. He also made rather superficial use of the Home Office papers and their reports of meetings of branches in order to show the social composition of the L.D.A. Only one reference was cited (p.32) which contained a report of a police raid on an Association meeting at which a coal-whipper, boot-maker, tailor and porter were present. Schoyen assumed (p.31) that the Spitalfield's silk-weavers were the dominant force in the Association as they were the most oppressed group, although he provided no evidence to prove this assertion. Similarly no direct proof was offered to substantiate the view that the L.D.A. had become "the mass-party of the Metropolis by the autumn of 1838" (p.32).

After 1840, the Northern Star became Schoyen's major source. Harney was at first a correspondent in Sheffield, later a writer on German affairs and closely linked with Engels, and finally assistant editor until 1847 when he became editor with Ernest

Jones as assistant. A fairly accurate picture of Harney's career emerged by using the Northern Star and Harney agreed that O'Connor gave him a fairly free hand and rarely interfered with his work.¹¹ Harney's viewpoint sometimes gave a distorted picture of Chartism as a whole. Sheffield was violent in 1840; while the large number of small artisans divided the trade unions in 1842, persuading Harney to vote against the strike. Engels did not have a very large influence on Chartism as a whole, and Harney's involvement in the Fraternal Democrats and internationalism after 1841 was certainly not typical of the whole movement.

Schoyen realised this and devoted over half the book to the period after 1848 when Harney's activities illuminated many important aspects of Chartism in decline, although like Jones, these were from the left of the movement. As a non-Marxist, however, Schoyen was more ready than Saville to point out (p.130) differences between Harney's "empiricism" and Marxian attempts "so systematize his observations and fit them into a philosophical framework". Schoyen drew the opposite conclusion to Saville from this point and argued (p.131) that Harney's "inveterate empiricism and indifference to theoretical system-building" showed him to be the prototype of British socialism rather than Engels or, indeed, Ernest Jones in his socialist phase.

Schoyen relied heavily on Harney's journals - the Democratic Review, the Red Republican and the Friend of the People - published between 1849 and 1852. He pointed out (p.186) that the

¹¹ Harney Papers, p.241.

Review in particular provided a unique "cross-section of collectivist thought in the post-1848 period". This empirical approach was a more accurate analysis than Saville's selection of Jones' material which attempted to prove the latter to be a disciple of Marx. Schoyen could not use the very small circulation figures of these journals - never above 3,000 - to prove that Harney had a large influence over the emergence of a social democratic movement in England, especially as he left England for Jersey in 1853.

Nevertheless Schoyen made some attempt to provide evidence of the strength of Chartist mass support in the 1850's. Only around five hundred members continued to subscribe to the National Charter Association, while Harney admitted in the Red Republican, in August 1850, that local associations were almost non-existent in the South. Schoyen pointed out, however, that there were only 2,000 members of the N.C.A. in 1848, but the Charter was supported by two million signatures. The Democratic Review contained reports of many small groups of Chartists in factory towns but they were isolated. Only local research and a full sociological study of the structure of each region could prove how Chartism lived on amongst the rank-and-file - either by the oral tradition, in a tenuous organization of one or two ex-Chartists, or as a contributor to the evolving ideology of Gladstonian liberalism. Schoyen had come to a similar conclusion to E. P. Thompson who argued that historians of Chartism have thought too much in terms of the institutionalized politics of today, instead of the modes of the period - equivalent to today's

African and Asian nationalist movements.¹² The time had come for Chartist historiography to make use of the techniques of social sciences and study regional Chartism in more depth than possible in a biography, if some of the basic problems of Chartism were to be solved.

Schoyen made much use of Harney's articles which appeared in the Newcastle Weekly Chronicle in 1892 and 1897. Here he criticised capitalist America as had Devyr. Unlike Lovett, Cooper, Frost and others, Harney rejected Gladstonianism in favour of linking Empire to England in a mutually beneficial pact. A close study of Harney's correspondence with Engels during the 1880's and 1890's would have enabled Schoyen to provide an analysis of Harney's contribution to working class ideology. Certainly, like nearly all old Chartists, he expressed great disappointment and contempt at the love of the masses for trash and their "lack of moral fibre". In 1894 he wrote to Engels, for example, on the anniversary of the 1848 revolutions when to his "bitter sorrow" he "believed in the sovereign people".¹³ Harney supported the I.L.P. and Ben Tillet's "New Unionism" but had a truly English suspicion of Marx's rigid ideology. He accused not only Gladstone, in 1877, of a "lust for Power" (p.307), but accused trade unionists of being as selfish as the ruling class. In 1894 he wrote that: "to not one of them at present before the public would I give a vote". He remained loyal to the Charter, however,

¹²E. P. Thompson, pp.935-6.

¹³Harney Papers, 355.

and lived long enough to have his views against free trade vindicated by the agricultural depression. He wrote in 1885 that: "slowly but surely Time is vindicating the action of the Chartists against the Manchester School and that School's hired agitators and journalists" (p.360, 306).

Harney's views came very close to Fabian élitism. He expressed faith in the "disciplined progress" of German socialists, but none at all in the English - "at once servile and tyrannical; the tools and creatures of the traitor Gladstone and his gang; and either the participants in or abjectly submissive to the new Trades Union Tyranny" (p.350). Harney had lost faith in the British working class rather than Chartism or socialism, but his views clearly showed the complexity and empirical nature of much of Chartist ideology.

CHAPTER VI

The Current State of Chartist Studies

By the end of the 1950's Namier's influence had become paramount amongst British historians. Namier was not followed completely, however, as his empirical methods were used by historians, such as Hobsbawm and E. P. Thompson, within a Marxist framework and combined with techniques borrowed from psychology and sociology. Non-Marxist historians, such as Trevor-Roper, also used similar techniques or, like G. R. Elton, rejected sociological techniques entirely and retreated into administrative history which was more conducive to the use of pure Namierite techniques of empiricism.¹

The publication of Chartist Studies (ed. A. Briggs), in 1959, therefore marked a pivotal point in both Chartist historiography and British historiography in general. The aim of the book was to provide detailed regional studies of Chartism in order to encourage a building up of a new synthesis of Chartism that went beyond earlier generalizations. Three chapters on Chartism as a "series of responses" were also added, including one on the Land Plan, a detailed study of the relationship between the League and the Chartists, and finally a study of the relationship between the government and Chartism. The danger of such an approach was, of course, that a very disparate picture of Chartism would evolve and minimize its importance as a national working

¹Stedman Jones, New Left Review, pp.39-40.

class movement.

Each chapter showed a different historiographical approach. Hugh Fearn's chapter on Chartism in Suffolk and R. B. Pugh's study of Chartism in Somerset and Wiltshire were severely limited by lack of sources. Fearn relied very heavily on the sympathetic Suffolk Chronicle which emphasised activity in Ipswich rather than in scattered villages, although he concluded that Suffolk farm labourers were not captured by Chartism with no direct supporting evidence except the survival of 18th century-style incendiarism in 1844 (p.172). Pugh showed Namierite empiricism at its worst: the reports in the Home Office papers were used to provide lists of meetings and members without comment or interpretation and the chapter came close to being an exercise in antiquarianism. Local Chartist leaders were studied closely but no attempt was made to build up a picture of the social and economic structure of the region linked to the total Chartist membership. Possible extra sources could have been oral traditions, perhaps published later in the century in the local press; the Poor Law Guardians' minute books; reports of trials and local histories such as Ward H. Raynburd's On the Agriculture of Suffolk, published in 1849.

The work of historians such as Christopher Hill, Trevor-Roper and Lawrence Stone, with their use of the framework of sociology and other social sciences, influenced Donald Read's chapter on Chartism in Manchester and J. F. C. Harrison's study of Leeds' Chartism. Read attempted one of the first comparative studies of

working class radicalism in a particular region. He traced the radical tradition from the 1790's to the Peterloo Massacre in 1819 and the trade union and anti-Poor Law agitation of the 1830's and related this to Manchester Chartism. He did not, however, go on to determine the specific characteristics of the social structure and relate them to sociological models.

Read too often accepted the opinions of his major source - the Manchester Guardian - in spite of its strongly anti-Chartist bias. He accepted, for example, the paper's opinion that the second Kersal Moor demonstration of 1838 was not successful and that most of the demonstrators were "more interested in the horse races which followed ... than in the meeting (p.47). Read's basically neo-Whig historiographical approach was thus clearly demonstrated - the rank-and-file Chartists were assumed to have been easily led or disinterested in Chartist ideas.

Harrison's sources for Chartism in Leeds were more plentiful. The Northern Star originated in the West Riding and gave detailed reports for the area - easily checked with the radical Leeds Mercury and the Leeds Times. Harrison found two radical traditions in the area: the socialist intellectuals associated with J. F. Bray whose Labour's Wrongs and Labour's Remedy was a great influence on Marx; and the tough, proletarian tradition which thrived on anti-Poor Law demonstrations. George White was in the latter tradition: the Northern Star reported in 1844 that on his release from prison he was returning to the militant Bradford area - Leeds being too moderate (pp.71-2. n.2.).

Harrison's study of Chartist infiltration into municipal politics, through vestry meetings, gave a valuable insight into the complexity of the Chartist response, but a list of the successful candidates' occupations showed them to be anything but typical of the rank-and-file. Concentration on Leeds' Chartism gave a distorted view of the Yorkshire movement which, as Ben Wilson has shown, was often violent in the West Riding.

Harrison balanced his study of moderate Leeds with one of "physical force" Leicester, using the Northern Star and the Leicester Chronicle rather than Cooper's autobiography. The radical Chronicle gave reports of mass meetings, indicating rank-and-file strength, although its estimates of people varied wildly and were not checked against other sources.

Harrison attempted to place Chartism within the social framework of the region by describing, from reports in the Star, open-air meetings, lectures, a Chartist Sunday School and activities of Land Scheme branches, in the post-1842 period when reports in the local press declined. Earlier historians had accepted this as evidence of decreased rank-and-file interest due to a revival of trade and good harvests.

Great emphasis was placed on studying local Chartist leaders, which, although limited in scope, greatly extended knowledge of Chartist roots, ideology and complexity. Although known as moral-force men, many local Chartist leaders emphasised that physical force "was a time honoured method of securing social and political change used by all classes in all societies since

ancient times" (p.135). This showed the falseness of the Hovellian dichotomy made between moral and physical force and confirmed the complexity of Chartist violence.

David Williams' chapter on Welsh Chartism largely concentrated on the violent events at Newport and Llanidloes in 1839. Detailed recent research by Owen Ashton and Angela Johns has modified most of Williams' conclusions. Their detailed investigations were concentrated on very small regions and individual towns using the local press and Home Office papers. They found that the Llanidloes riot had very little to do with Chartism and the Llanidloes and Merthyr Chartists formed literary and debating societies and temperance groups after 1839. Radical nonconformist influences were very strong in South Wales, shown by the election of Henry Richard as Liberal M.P. for Merthyr in 1868. Even this latest research, like Williams', could not measure the true feelings of the rank-and-file and their participation, or otherwise, in social activities or nonconformist politics. Voting in 1868 was restricted and open to intimidation and the local press often over-emphasised peaceful activity if they could gain support for their nonconformist politicians.

Alex Wilson's chapter on Scottish Chartism, in contrast, emphasised the moral force nature of Chartism. Numbers of Chartist schools, cooperatives, temperance societies and, above all, Chartist churches were listed; the figures taken from the Chartist and local press. Wilson directly equated the strength and nature of Scottish Chartism with the numerical strength of the organized

movement. He concluded that there was a "fairly strong agitation until 1842", and then "the stagnation and virtual decay of Chartist organization thereafter" (pp.249-50). Wilson appeared completely unable to think outside the institutional political mode of today and write in terms of the whole social framework and the non-political activities of Chartism.

Like the other contributors, Wilson emphasised the role of the leaders, such as John Fraser and William Pattison of the steam-engine makers union, described by Wilson (pp.64-5) as "prudent and zealous, reliable, self-reliant and self-assured and convinced that middle class aid was crucial although his model Chartist was Lovett".

Joy MacAskill's chapter on the Land Plan provided an important national study of a neglected topic. Sources used included the reports of the Select Committee on the National Land Company; the Labourer, published between 1847 and 1848, edited by E. Jones and O'Connor; the Northern Star; various pamphlets written by O'Connor; and the provincial press. The Labourer was used to show the relative sophistication of O'Connor's views. He accepted industrialism and did not simply want a return to a "golden age" (pp.306-7).² It was not shown, however, that O'Connor's political philosophy owed more to Cobbett than O'Brien as he attacked the aristocracy in class terms, both in England and Ireland, and "the barbarous laws of primogeniture, settlement and entail". O'Connor also believed the division between rich

²Cp. above, p.59.

and poor owed more to feudalism than capitalism.³

O'Connor praised trade unions as "the healthiest shoot that springs from the democratic trunk", while he denounced labour aristocrats who, although more intelligent than their oppressors, were reactionary, selfish and even debauched. The Land Plan could be viewed, therefore, both as a substitute for trade unionist support for Chartism, and as part of an overall scheme to increase the power of labour.

MacAskill's main failing was her inability to effectively tackle the question of the nature of the Land Plan's appeal to the rank-and-file, the size of this support and if or why it fluctuated. The Labourer was full of allegories such as "The Jolly Young Poacher", a tale of "merrie England" and the good old pre-industrial days, and a story about two imaginary Stockport Chartists - Will and Betty Wright - and how the Scheme seemed to be their only hope. At last the Charter meant the possibility of obtaining concrete benefits as Betty remarked: "The Charter was always getting thee into trouble, now the Land Scheme will put thee in bread". Will replied that "the Charter is the means and the land is the end". Specific details of life in "the promised land" were given and Will and Betty finished by leading a healthy and respectable life, having the vote and attending church.⁴

Such a method of journalism, which sought to influence the

³The Labourer, Vol.I, preface, (1847).

⁴Ibid., 34, 36.

"fluctuating rank-and-file" of the movement using relatively sophisticated techniques of combining concrete benefits with political theory in a style likely to appeal to an unsophisticated audience, was novel and marked a substantial landmark in popular journalism and politics. Even elementary concepts taken from sociology and social psychology, such as "role analysis", "social control", modes, norms and others, could have given MacAskill insight into the nature and scale of the appeal of the Land Plan. The latter gave tangible hope to the factory slaves whose social norms were being violently disrupted and O'Connor's combination of the familiar with the novel in the promised land appealed directly to the millenarian fantasies of his still unsophisticated followers. O'Connor's muddled thinking exactly matched that of the rank-and-file Chartists caught between the beliefs and norms of the pre-industrial and industrial society. Similarly O'Connor faithfully reflected the complex evolution of working class political ideas from custom and millenarianism to the "rights of man" and "popular sovereignty".⁵

Rather than including any qualitative analysis of the Land Plan's appeal and likely impact, MacAskill kept to a basic numerical count of districts and branches which subscribed to the Plan. Only larger branches were listed and sums sent in by branches were totals; thus giving no clue of individual contributions and numerical strength. The districts varied widely

⁵Rudé, pp.226, 234.

in size and therefore gave little indication of the strength of support.

MacAskill concluded with a valuable analysis of the occupations of settlers on the Gloucestershire estates, using the local press, parish registers and census reports. She concluded that most were artisans who continued their beliefs in self-help and independence by means of the Land Plan.

Lucy Brown's task in studying the relations between the Anti-Corn Law League and the Chartists was made easier by her use of the J. B. Smith MSS; the League press, such as the Anti-Bread Tax Circular and the Anti-Corn Law Circular and the pro-League Manchester Guardian. She also used the Memoirs of J. Sturge by Henry Richard and the Northern Star. Naturally the League's reaction to Chartism was easier to describe and Brown admitted this as no generalization about "working class or middle class opinion (could) be made without substantial local qualifications" (p.343) - impossible in a short chapter.

Brown confirmed that Bright and others used the "brickbat" argument by stirring up discontent to frighten the government into accepting their demands (p.348), and thus confirmed Rothstein's previously improved theory of a bourgeois conspiracy.⁶ Brown was less successful in dealing with the more complex and diffuse attitudes of Chartists towards the League. Although the problem of assessing rank-and-file opinion obviously had to be faced, Brown merely made suppositions backed by one or two

⁶ Above, p.72
Sept. 3, 1842.

and O'Connor's view, Northern Star,

factual pieces of evidence. The speeches of two Chartists reported in the Northern Star in 1840, were given as the sole evidence of Chartists believing that repeal would be acceptable only if accompanied by numerous other measures. Other Chartists were in favour but thought the Charter should come first - no evidence was given for this- and few examples - other than O'Connor - were given of Chartists in total opposition to the League. Not only was free trade viewed as a threat to agricultural workers, but eventually foreign competition would harm factory workers.⁷

F. C. Mather's chapter was an attempt to describe the government's attitudes towards Chartism and its methods of dealing with the phenomenon. Sources were obviously plentiful and the chapter was later expanded into a full-length book.⁸ Mather found private papers of statesmen such as Russell to be poor sources. Chartism was mentioned only at times of crisis, or when Chartists and Tories combined at elections. Hansard debates provided a very useful record of ruling class attitudes, but again only during crisis periods. Mather relied very heavily on the Home Office Papers, with all their advantages and drawbacks.

Mather concluded that Melbourne's ministry handled Chartism fairly well; Russell in particular having been confident that violence could be contained. He could find no evidence "for any

⁷Harney Papers, 355.

⁸F. C. Mather, Public Order in the Age of the Chartists (London, 1959).

systematic plan to crush the popular leaders, as by arresting its leaders" (p.384). This was probably not due to the superior liberality of the Whigs, as implied by Mather, but rather their complete isolation from the dangers and implications of the "Condition of England Question". Mather based his view on the leniency of the government in 1848 on only one letter in the Home Office Papers. Grey's "Crown and Government Security Act" - "the Gagging Act" - was not mentioned, neither was the massive use of agents-provocateurs and spies during riots in London and the North.⁹ This was hardly a simple attempt to "get to the bottom of the affair" (p.397).

Chartist Studies was a key landmark in Chartist historiography. It contained a wide variety of approaches to basic historiographical problems and varied markedly in the degree of new insights provided into these problems. All the writers had been strongly influenced by Namier, much less so by concepts and techniques provided by social sciences. The emphasis was very much on Chartist leaders rather than the rank-and-file. Very little attempt had been made to come to terms with one of the key problems of Chartism: the reaction of the general working population to the movement, the intensity of this reaction and whether it varied, which aspects of Chartism appealed most strongly and to whom and, finally, whether this appeal varied according to time and place.

The problem of assessing Chartist strength had not really been faced in Chartist Studies. Too often if no reports appeared

⁹Schoyen, 175.

in the Home Office papers or the local press the movement was assumed to have lost most of its support although Chartist activity probably continued in a less publicised form. No differentiation was made between the official, organised movement and the residual effects of Chartism amongst the local communities.

The next major work on Chartism reverted back to the biographical approach. Eric Glasgow and Donald Reed's biography of O'Connor - Feargus O'Connor: Irishman and Chartist - published in 1961, was fundamentally neo-Whig in its historiographical approach; utilizing Namier's empirical methods, without his psychoanalysis, and grafting them onto a basically liberal belief in the idea of progress. The book was of only about 150 pages and their view of O'Connor had changed very little from that of Hovell.

Glasgow's section on O'Connor's Irish background and its influence on the latter's political thinking was the most original and satisfactory part of the book. Sources were few, however, and there was a gap for most of the 1820's - a formative period in O'Connor's life. Secondary sources, such as J. A. Froude's The English in Ireland in the 18th Century, 1872, were used to provide an outline of O'Connor's family background as modest landowners in County Cork. Glasgow concluded (p.14) that "his family was Irish, revolutionary and believed itself to be royal". Other sources included the O'Connor Papers, the Records of the King's Inn, Dublin and a few letters sent by O'Connor to his cousin, W. J. O'Neill. These were not plentiful but far more

so than for most Chartist leaders.

Glasgow's style was that of a straightforward narration of facts in an attempt to be impartial. This was difficult, however, as sources were scarce and Glasgow used two hostile sources - Graham Wallas and Thomas Cooper - to prove that O'Connor had acquired "only a thin veneer of culture" (p.17). He appeared reluctant to analyse O'Connor's political philosophy and deemed the ideas expressed in his pamphlet A State of Ireland written in 1822. Glasgow's attitude was negative. He declared that O'Connor's "stock of ideas was limited; and that those he had were often repeated" (p.26). He made no attempt to explain O'Connor's motives in making a "grand alliance" with the English workers after 1835 (p.38).

Read continued the emphasis on O'Connor's call for an Irish-English alliance, but combined Glasgow's narrative style with an even more critical approach. The main defect of the study was Read's failure to provide a full analysis of O'Connor's ideology. His approach to the Land Scheme was generally unsympathetic; numerous faults in O'Connor's calculations were stressed and the impression was given that O'Connor's ideas were backward-looking and totally unrealistic in the new industrial society (pp.109-110). Similarly, Read failed to explain the appeal of the Plan to the rank-and-file, merely arguing that factory workers would find it very hard to live off the land, although many had recently left the countryside (p.109).

Read used mainly secondary sources and the hostile Manchester

press for O'Connor's career in England in 1835. The Kersal Moor speech of 1838, for example, showed, to Read, O'Connor's speaking as "colourful and effective", but also "egotistical" (p.71). The positive themes of the speech such as the Irish alliance, the union between Chartism and trade unions, and its impact on the masses were ignored. Above all, Read underestimated the impact of O'Connor on the ordinary Chartists and how they came to identify with him as their only hope in a hostile society.¹⁰

Read over-estimated O'Connor's favourable attitude to Sturge at the Nottingham by-election in August 1842. This was probably mere political tactics, as was his support of the Jones in 1841 (pp.101-102). In September, 1842, for example, O'Connor attacked the League plotters: "It is well understood by all the country who it is that have ... planned and originated the late 'risings' and 'riots' ... the League's Conference ... was to consider the propriety of stopping all the mills in one day and they would do it." O'Connor still, however, hoped that the Complete Suffrage Union conference would succeed later in the year.¹¹ Later again, O'Connor found "appalling evidence of invincible and deadly animosity entertained by the whole complex of the wealthy against poverty - this spirit is usually with greatest virulence by those who have most of the oil of pharisaic 'liberalism' on their lips."¹²

¹⁰ Cp. above pp. 98-99 ; ; D. Jones, Chartism and the Chartists, pp.128-133, p.100.

¹¹ Northern Star, Sept.3, 1842.

¹² Ibid., Oct.22.

O'Connor further argued that: "No mistake is more stupid than that of those who tell us that the working class cannot work out their own emancipation without aid from the middle class." He agreed with Lovett that the people must be educated, and he compared the "immoral" aristocracy unfavourably with the "so-called brutal lower orders" with their "intemperance and general love of sensual and animal delights". He concluded that nothing alarmed the upper and middle classes more than the progress of education among the masses.¹³

Unlike Namier, Read made no psycho-analysis of his subject - devoting a mere six pages to O'Connor's private life. After a long catalogue of financial trickery, egotism and despotism, Read unexpectedly reached a fairly favourable conclusion. O'Connor's leadership was praised for rousing mass support, although his "noisy demagoguery" made failure certain as it precluded bourgeois support. But Read insisted that O'Connor's philosophy was "fundamentally unsound" and had little original contribution to make to political thought" (pp.346-7).

During the 1960's British historiography continued to develop along the general lines set out by Namier and his disciples. Often Namier's empiricism was combined with the idea of progress and moralising, in the case of neo-Whigs, or Marxism, in the case of New Left historians. A new departure, however, was made by E. H. Carr in his book What is History ? published in 1961. He

¹³Ibid., Oct.29.

attacked both moralism and empiricism and argued that history was "a continuous process of interaction between the historian and his facts, an unending dialogue between the present and the past", and that "objectivity in history ... cannot be an objectivity of fact but ... of the relations between fact and interpretation, between past, present and future". Carr argued that historical facts were inseparable from the interpretations determined by the values of historians. He concluded that historiography was essentially a "progressive science" (p.124) and that the objective historian was one who could place himself above his own contemporary society and historical vision and attempt a broad view of the future in relation to the past and present. Historical concepts would be left to time as "history acquires meaning and objectivity only when it establishes a coherent relation between past and future" (p.130).

Carr had followed Carl Becker who argued that "... history is not an objective reality, but only an imaginative reconstruction of vanished events, the pattern that appears useful and agreeable to one generation is never entirely so to the next".¹⁴ Becker continued that history was a "method of approach rather than ... a special field of study", and that "much of what is called science is properly history" (p.18). He further argued that the trend of modern thought was "away from an overdone rationalization of the facts to a more careful and disinterested examination of the facts themselves" (p.20).

¹⁴Carl Becker, The Heavenly City of the 18th Century Philosophers (Yale, 1932), 88.

The change in direction of historians' interests away from élite groups, associated with the Namierites, towards society as a whole has revealed a large gap in historiographical method which was beginning to be realised in the 1960's. Increasingly "brute empiricism" and a saturation in primary sources "unguided by canons for generating data and gauging inferences"¹⁵ was becoming unsatisfactory. Historians now had to face the questions of whether historical procedures could be scientific and of whether a "scientific history should restrict itself to largely quantified data accumulated by structured observation in empirical situations approximating (with specified deviations) the mode of controlled experiments" (quoted on p.526).

Obviously the above could never apply to history, although social sciences, with their less precise techniques, could be useful for historians. Hobsbawm has pointed out that new techniques for handling large quantities of historical data using the research and technological devices used by social scientists are needed.¹⁶ Society can provide certain visions or patterns of possible structures and terms - such as "role" - to order material. Hobsbawm believed economics to be a more likely aid for historians, however, as sociological structural-functional patterns show what societies have in common, whereas social history tries to describe how societies change (p.28). Nevertheless,

¹⁵ Lee Benson, "An Approach to the Scientific Study of Past Public Opinion", Public Opinion Quarterly, 1968, pp.529.

¹⁶ Hobsbawm, "From Social History to the History of Society", p.27.

he believed that a comparative study of social structures could provide a useful analysis of specific characteristics.

Social history in general and Chartist history in particular, require models in order to fit necessarily partial and scattered data into a coherent system to provide a guide to collective action and its participants. George Rudé in his The Crowd in History, 1730-1848, published in 1963, used the techniques of sociology, social psychology and comparative history. An example of the concepts used was that of Smelser's "generalized beliefs". These stressed the differences between "primitive" - or pre-industrial - beliefs and "activate people for participation in collective behaviour", and more sophisticated norm and value-orientated beliefs of an industrial and class conscious class.¹⁷ The "primitive" beliefs included hysteria and wish-fulfillment beliefs in various panaceas and hero worship; in addition there were hostile beliefs containing elements of the two latter concepts along with the need for a simple scapegoat such as "the Rich". The most advanced type of crowd behaviour was that associated with norm and value-orientated beliefs. The former was often a feature of pre-industrial radical movements which sought to restore lost social norms such as Saxon democracy. The myth of the "Norman Yoke" persisted well into the Chartist period as was evident from the writings of Thomas Frost and O'Connor's Land Plan. Paine's ideas were taken up by the

¹⁷Smelser, Theory of Collective Behaviour, pp.109-110.

Chartists and grafted onto those of an older tradition.¹⁸

In Smelser's view, value-orientated beliefs demanded a modification of the political, social or economic basis of society and a "basic reconstitution of self and society" (p.120). This was seen as the highest stage of the evolution of generalization beliefs, identified by a regeneration of values and a pre-occupation with the highest moral basis of social life. Chartism was rich in such value-orientated themes as socialism, religion, democracy, cooperation and trade unionism, all of which lead to a future of harmony and stability compared to a present of decay and unrest.

Both Smelser and Rudé have pointed out that even the most advanced forms of generalized beliefs contain all the elements of the lesser forms. Rudé has shown how certain ideas in the "pre-industrial" crowd correspond to value-orientated beliefs; thus there was a strong element of "levelling" throughout the Wilkite and later movements although it was probably more instinctive than a result of Jacobin propaganda (p.225). Proof of these levelling ideas and those of the "freeborn Englishmen" relied very heavily on the indirect evidence of the crowd's behaviour and the views of a few of the arrested rioters. These "pre-industrial" riots were marked by less complex and advanced generalized beliefs such as xenophobia, and "Church and King" most of which were largely absent from the Chartist period.

¹⁸E. P. Thompson, 95.

The latter did, however, contain many elements of millenarian fantasies, appeals to custom, and even "folk violence" such as the "pulling down" of houses as at Stoke-on-Trent in 1842. Even as late as 1852 it has been shown from the Tasmanian State Archives that thirty-five convicts were transported for arson, although this compared with eighty-nine in 1846-47 (P.241).

Since the early 1960's surprisingly few historians have followed Rudé in using techniques derived from social sciences. Neo-Marxist and other left wing Chartist historians have generally been more willing to use these techniques than neo-Whig and other more right-wing writers. The former have tried to prove that the rank-and-file Chartists were politically conscious and not merely misled by demagogues. Historians such as Alex Wilson remained faithful to empiricism and rejected the concept of political consciousness amongst the rank-and-file. He claimed that Chartist meetings "provided some of the fun of the fair, the excitement of a horse-race, the purgative righteousness of attendance at church".¹⁹ Such historians wanted to prove that the Industrial Revolution brought both intellectual and economic benefits to the workers, shown by their eager cooperation with Gladstonian liberalism and earlier traditional bourgeoisie, as in Scotland.

D. J. Rowe's articles on London Chartism²⁰ showed the position of the historians of the conservative Namierite school who combined

¹⁹ A. Wilson, "Chartism", in J. T. Ward (ed.) Popular Movements (1970), 132.

²⁰ D. J. Rowe, "The L.W.M.A. and the People's Charter, Past and Present, no.36 (Ap.1967).
D. J. Rowe, "Chartism and the Spitalfields Silk Weavers", E.H.R. (Dec.1967).

empiricism with a neo-Whig ideology. Rowe wanted to prove that Chartism in London owed its ideology to bourgeois radicalism and not to the artisan élite, seen as precursors of the Labour Party by Hovell. Rowe's sources consisted mainly of the Place Papers from which he took Place's account of the founding of the L.W.M.A.; ignoring Lovett's account quoted by Hovell. Rowe concluded that as bourgeois influence was so strong in the L.W.M.A. it followed that Chartism was "not an essentially working class programme set out by a working class consciousness" (p.81). This emphasised Rowe's inability to think of Chartism outside the context of its programme and organization.

Similarly, Rowe tried to prove that London Chartism was not supported by the silkweavers of Spitalfields; thus showing the victory of bourgeois utilitarianism in London. His evidence came from police reports of the meetings of the L.D.A. to show that no weavers were present. Obviously it was impossible to quote all the reports, therefore Rowe's conclusion that few weavers were interested was inconclusive. His only direct evidence was a letter from a weaver claiming that few in Spitalfields supported Chartism (pp.487-88). It was likely that the weaver was anxious to show the authorities that Chartism was weak amongst his friends.

Neo-Marxist historians have tried to prove that Chartist ideology evolved from a long tradition of working class radicalism which deeply penetrated into the consciousness of the masses and later re-emerged, at the end of the nineteenth century, as

socialism and Marxism after a brief period of close affinity with bourgeois radicalism during the middle of the century. Necessarily, such historians have tried to penetrate beyond the "disembodied abstractions" of Marxists and others and find a way of penetrating "opaque communities" and find how far Chartist ideology penetrated the rank-and-file. Further, which aspects of this ideology appealed most to which groups and at which times.

Such historians wanted to prove that a workers' socialist state was possible in the future based on genuine support, not demagoguery and coercion. Part of their case was that the workers' intellectual life was superior before the Industrial Revolution destroyed their independent life-style, and the bourgeoisie tried to stifle their opposition to bourgeois capitalism.

Bennett's study of the Democratic Association, 1837-1841, attempted to place her subject within a sociological framework without actually using terms such as "generalized beliefs", "social control", "precipitatory factors", "structural standards", "social moves", "folkways", "role analysis", "class", "status" and "social models". She followed Abrams' and Rothman's dictum that a sociological model and a framework of sociological laws were essential to historians when attempting to build "synchronic structural representations of a whole social system or institution".²¹

Bennett's main sources were the Home Office Papers which provided basic information on the distribution of the L.D.A. membership, its social composition and level of activity which

²¹ P. Abrams and D. J. Rothman, "Sociology and History", P. & P. No.52, p.118.

Bennett then had to interpret. A general description of London was given - taken from G. L. Gomme's London in the Reign of Victoria, published in 1898 - which described the major occupations in each area of London, probably deriving the division between the élitest honourable and overcrowded dishonourable trades from Henry Mayhew.²² Bennett then tried to correlate the H.O. Papers' reports of L.D.A. meetings with the social and economic structure of London.

Bennett laboriously pieced together reports of L.D.A. meetings and, in contrast to Rowe, found weavers to be the most numerous supports after shoemakers. Only one labourer was found and very few Irish workers. These findings contradicted Schoyen's assertion (pp.31-2) that only the "most oppressed groups" and "a fraction of the London working class" joined the L.D.A.

Unlike the Namierites, Bennett underplayed the role of Harney, preferring to view the L.D.A. as a spontaneous outburst of class consciousness which stemmed from deeply rooted London radicalism and its social structure.

Bennett failed to provide sufficient direct proof of a growth in class consciousness. She did not fully come to terms with this problem of attributing the views of a small sample - often of the artisan élite - to the rank-and-file of Chartists or even to the whole working class. Instead, she fell back on E. P. Thompson's comparison between Chartism and modern nationalism as "proof" of the spread of Chartist ideas into the working class

²² E.g. Mayhew's descriptions of the tailors, in E. P. Thompson and E. Yeo (eds.), The Unknown Mayhew (London, 1971), 218-219.

consciousness.

Iowerth Prothero's article on London Chartism²³ was a reinterpretation rather than an original study. Using the work of Bennett, Rowe and Schoyen, he concluded that it was not until the 1840's that London Chartism became class conscious, both in leaders and composition. His proof of the latter was based on the economic argument that the economic difficulties of several trades - especially tailors and shoemakers - led to more unity and class consciousness.

R. Challinor and B. Ripley's study of the relationship between the Miners' Association and the Chartists²⁴ continued the trend towards seeing Chartism as a "series of responses" - given a strong impetus by Chartist Studies - and that of trying to prove the class consciousness of the ordinary Chartists during the 1840's. The authors tried to demonstrate that the miners' union formed close links with the Chartists, both in personnel and ideology; thus providing indirect proof of a rejection of bourgeois ideology by both miners and Chartists.

The most successful part of the study was the tracing of the history of the Association, using a wide range of scarce union journals, press cuttings and other documents in the Cowen Collection. Total membership and leadership of the union were also analysed and related to the sociological structure of the miners. The miners'

²³I. Prothero, "Chartism in London", Past and Present, Aug.1969.

²⁴R. Challinor and B. Ripley, The Miners' Association: A Trade Union in the Age of the Chartists (London, 1968).

press gave several instances of how the union prevents violence, but Challinor and Ripley devoted more space to the miners' strike of 1844.

Evidence to prove the Association to be a Chartist union was circumstantial and very inconclusive, although sufficient to undermine the Webbian myth of the complete divorce between unions and Chartism. It was shown that Chartism was very active in mining areas from the lists of people who signed Chartist petitions, printed in the Northern Star, although few miners were nominated to the Chartist General Council. Miners' leaders such as Martin Jude and Tom Heburn were also involved in Chartism, alongside bourgeois allies of the union such as T. S. Duncombe and W. P. Roberts, the legal adviser of both O'Connor and the Association.

The authors failed, however, to prove that the rank-and-file unionists were Chartists and that there was large-scale support for Chartism at union meetings. It was true, for example, that both the North-East and South Wales were strong physical force Chartist areas, as well as mining areas, but the link between the two was not proved. Evidence that the Association discouraged links between Chartists and the union during the strike of 1844, was dismissed as "expedient for tactical reasons" in the wake of repression. The authors attempted to describe the varied appeal of Chartism to the ordinary miners: some genuinely understood Chartist policies, others had limited objectives at first, and a third group supported Chartism as "an act of rebellion against their masters". Insufficient evidence was offered, however,

to support the conclusion that the union made Chartism a "genuinely working class movement" (pp.22-23).

Challinor and Ripley had made some attempt to face the problem of assessing rank-and-file opinion but failed to make sufficient use of available sources or to employ social scientific techniques. Their main aim was rather to show that "the lessons of their brothers in the 1840's were there for (the miners) to see" (p.250).

Neo-Whig and non-socialist historians such as Harrison and Hollis²⁵ selected subjects such as Lowery who seemed to prove their assertion that Chartism naturally and inevitably moved towards liberalism, through the temperance movement and religion. They concluded that the working class consciousness of self-help and self respect was very close to mid-Victorian liberalism and Lowery's autobiography showed the inevitable "embourgeoisement" of working class leaders.

Brian Harrison continued this argument in his article on "Teetotal Chartism" in History (volume LVIII, pp.193-217). He agreed that pubs were an integral part of working class life and that even the artisan élite were divided on temperance. Lovett, for example, supported temperance but was not in the official temperance Chartist movement. The key figure was Henry Vincent and Harrison used his letters and the Chartist Circular to sketch his importance. Harrison believed teetotal Chartism to be strongest in the North - basing his opinion on the signatures

²⁵B. Harrison and P. Hollis, "Chartism, Liberalism and the Life of Robert Lowery", E.H.R., LXXXII (1967).

on a petition of 1840 reprinted in the Morning Chronicle. He provided no conclusive proof for his view that "teetotal Chartism flourished after 1839, largely because the events of that year clarified the importance of a middle class and radical alliance" (p.201). Like other neo-Whig historians, Harrison made no attempt at all to gauge the extent of rank-and-file support and its distribution.

The biographical approach to Chartist historiography has also continued in recent years. W. H. Maehl's article on Augustus Beaumont.²⁶ His sources included letters and pamphlets written by Beaumont, combined with obituary published in the Northern Liberator. Beaumont was American by birth, reared in Jamaica and lived in England from 1835 until his death in 1838. He was an interesting example of the varied and often eccentric bourgeois supporters of Chartism at its foundation. Like other biographers, however, Maehl perhaps overestimated his subject's influence. He believed, for example, that Beaumont injected a "near revolutionary militancy" into the North-East, although it was probably there anyway. Maehl attempted a psychological analysis of why this former slave-holder from Jamaica became an English radical - concluding that his lack of property and dependence on his own efforts were the main reasons. He also quoted R. S. Neale's concept of a flexible "middling class" who formed a bridge between working and middle classes.

²⁶ W. H. Maehl, "Augustus Hardin Beaumont, Anglo-American Radical", International Review of Social History, XIV (2), 1969.

Ray Boston's study, British Chartists in America (Manchester, 1971), continued this biographical approach. It traced the influence of individual Chartists who had emigrated to America. Very little analysis of the relationship between Chartism and American radicalism was provided, instead Boston wrote as much detail as possible about individual Chartists; lack of sources led him to concentrate on the careers of only ten out of the seventy mentioned. Boston made a valuable attempt to discover the views of obscure Chartists but this was of little more than antiquarian interest as he failed to comment on whether their views were typical, which aspects of Chartism appealed to them and when, and finally on these Chartists' often tortuous and complex thinking on Chartism and its relationship to the American system of government.

A. Plummer's long-awaited biography of Bronterre O'Brien²⁷ displayed a rather Whiggish historiographical approach. The emphasis was also very much on O'Brien as an individual, without Namierite psycho-analysis. O'Brien was not placed into his historical context and no detailed analysis was given of the evolution of O'Brien's theories. Instead, Plummer viewed him as a precursor of modern social democracy.

Like Rowe, Wilson and other neo-Whig and non-socialist historians, Plummer claimed (p.33) that O'Brien's Poor Man's Guardian and the working class press in general had a "very small if not negligible" effect on the spread of political

²⁷A. Plummer, Bronterre, A Political Biography of B. O'Brien, 1804-64 (London, 1971).

knowledge among the masses. His only proof was taken from the opinion of Place, and no estimation was given of the extent of the influence of O'Brien's writings. Moreover, there was not a wide enough selection of O'Brien's writings quoted; Plummer in fact argued that the latter were more concerned with organization than ideology as the latter would have been "too solid" for the working class (p.66) - a value judgment based solely on opinion.

In Plummer's view, O'Brien's ideas owed much to Paine and Robespierre and he "anticipated the fundamental views of Kapital". The only proof of the latter, however, was provided by a mention of a meeting between Engels and O'Brien in 1849. Plummer argued that, unlike Marx, O'Brien called for the masses to organize and use the existing political system to gain state power; thus he "led the first generally democratic movement for social reform in modern history and its spirit survived to enrich the Labour Party (p.257).

O'Brien's political thought developed empirically alongside the growing working class - a trait condemned by Marxists and neo-Whig historians such as Plummer (p.256), as a failure to be systematic. O'Brien rivalled and anticipated Marx by his critique of capitalism and exposure of a middle class conspiracy, but did not reach Marx's conclusion of the necessity for social revolution. Except for a short period, O'Brien maintained property rights and the right to keep the surplus of honest labour, while retaining the labour theory of value upheld by Bray and Owen. After 1848 O'Brien joined the mainstream of radicalism by

entering the National Reform League which advocated land nationalization alongside the inviolability of private property.

Plummer concentrated on O'Brien's career at its zenith between 1838 and 1840, whereas a broader analysis of his writings up to the 1860's would have brought out the full complexity and importance of his career to the evolution of British empirical socialism. The significance of O'Brien's career as a pioneering radical journalist was also seriously neglected by Plummer, whereas O'Brien himself had argued that "the press is the great engine of every moral good and social improvement".²⁸

Alex Wilson's study of Scottish Chartism²⁹ expanded and continued his chapter in Chartist Studies. His emphasis was very much on the organized movement and its leaders, without any psychological analysis of the latter. Like Plummer there was a Whiggish flavour to the book, which consisted of a chronological survey and an institutional history with very little analysis of Chartist ideology, roots, or social composition. No attempt was made to relate the movement to the economic and social structure of Scotland and its people nor, indeed, to the English Chartist movement.

Like other neo-Whig historians, such as Harrison, Hollis and Ward, Wilson admitted the growth of an organized, independent working class social and political movement, but emphasised its close compatibility with bourgeois liberalism, both in its

²⁸The Operative, Dec.1838.

²⁹A. Wilson, A History of the Chartist Movement in Scotland (Manchester, 1970).

ideological roots and personnel. Unlike neo-Marxist or socialist historians, Wilson put divisions in the movement down to personality clashes rather than ideological differences (p.101). No evidence was quoted, however, to show how far the leaders' ideology was shared by the rank-and-file, especially those not active in the organized movement (p.114).

Wilson made full and careful use of such sources as the True Scotsman and the Scottish Patriot; the latter designed to appeal "not merely to Chartists but also to a wide range of middle class reformers".³⁰ He also made use of the Scottish Letter Books (1836-1847) contained in the Home Office Papers, but relied heavily on the Place Papers and the Parliamentary Papers. The limitations of these sources were made clear by Wilson's description of the Glasgow riots of 1848: these were blamed (p.216) on "thoughtless youths" and "Irish navvies", whose misdeeds were reported in a largely hostile press.

Wilson gave a full and detailed description of organized Scottish Chartism and clearly portrayed the complexity and deep-rooted nature of the movement - as shown in the career of the Reverend Patrick Brewster. Unfortunately, Wilson never faced the problem of the measurement of Chartist support outside the organized movement, nor the related problem of the extent and nature of Scottish Chartism's appeal to the Scottish working class. After 1848, for example, he argued that Chartism had died and its supporters joined the bourgeois reformers in a general

³⁰ Chartist Studies, 270.

radical programme. But his proof rested solely on the radical resolutions of the Scottish delegates at the Chartist Conference of 1851.

Dorothy Thompson's study, The Early Chartists (1971), was written within a sociological framework, even if sociological terms were not used. New questions about different aspects of Chartism were raised and illustrated from primary and secondary source material, much of which was little-known and not previously published. An introduction of thirty pages covered the current state of Chartist historiography. This was followed by a selection of documents grouped under various headings, such as the origins, motives and social composition of Chartism; propaganda; social activity; and Chartist clashes with the government. Sources included press and Home Office reports as well as more ephemeral material often ignored, such as broadsides, posters and a few handbills.

Thompson admitted the limitations of her sources and the problems of selection (pp.1-2), and both her material and interpretations reflected a neo-Marxist ideological position.

Thompson confined her work to the period 1836-40 - the most violent years - and to the militant areas of the North and South Wales. Many of her extracts did not support her contention that growing hostility between the middle and working class, caused by trade unionism and their increasing divergence of economic interests, advanced the new class-consciousness manifested in Chartism. Proof of this hostility was less impressive than her

illustration of the increase of more advanced generalized beliefs or of decreasing "folk violence". The basis of the proof of the literacy, rationality, sophistication and class consciousness of the Chartists consisted of a small selection of Chartist propaganda. Many of the extracts contained material which would not have been out of place on the platform of a Radical M.P. The tract issued by the Finsbury Chartists in 1839, for example, specifically denied the charge of levelling and attacked "placemen and unworthy pensioners" more than the middle class (p.92).

Thompson showed, however, that she was trying to face the problems of rank-and-file opinion on Chartism and the extent of its influence on the whole working class community. But she could provide only one exhibit of the actual experiences of a rank-and-file Chartist and this was a rare example of an incomplete autobiography of an anonymous ex-Chartist's experiences in 1848. Thompson was left to assume that it represented "a type of working-class experience which could have taken place at any time in the Chartist years" (p.45).

The most recent attempt at writing a full-scale history of Chartism was J. T. Ward's Chartism, published in 1973. Ward's aim was to provide a synthesis of the vast amount of work on Chartism written since Hovell's pioneering study. He expressed the aim of not suggesting "any particular group as the legatee of Chartism" or seeing "Chartism as part of some amorphous 'Working Class Movement'." It was simply to be "a history of

Chartism and Chartists and their forebears" (p.8). Such an unbiased empirical approach is almost impossible with Chartism, however, and Ward's basically neo-Whig position was soon evident.

Ward's account of London Chartism was, for example, largely based on the work of Rowe and Hovell. "The London poor", we are confidently assured, "had little contact with radicalism or with Chartism" (p.75). Much of the book consisted of repetition of previous surveys, using no sociological techniques or terminology. The approach was often simplistic, as when he argued that "in many places Chartism took on the menacing aspect of a terrorist organization" (p.120), and again that "many rank-and-file members were frightened, disorganised or disillusioned" (p.139), although no proof was offered.

On the whole, Ward's approach was negative. He continued the general practice of equating the strength of Chartism purely with the state of the organized movement. In his view, even the growth of N.C.A. branches "did not invariably represent any extensive membership" (p.151), as contributions were irregular. Such a statement showed a serious lack of historical understanding of communities at a fairly primitive stage of industrialisation, of their modes of behaviour, and of methods of group communication. Rather grudgingly Ward admitted that "despite all its charlatons, cowards and crooks, the movement retained the devoted loyalty of so many working men" (p.156).

Ward stretched his narrative, factual account of Chartism beyond the disaster of 1848 - claiming that the death of Chartism

coincided with the collapse of Ernest Jones' Cabinet newspaper. Yet he sensed that the spirit of Chartism lived on. His proof of the latter was the subsequent careers of Chartists in America and the careers of Chartist leaders rather than the movement's lasting influence on the working class community. Ward concluded that "thousands of humbler Chartists died unnoticed", but suggested no way of studying their lives.

Rather surprisingly, however, Ward almost admitted the weakness of past work on Chartism as he believed the nature of Chartism was "to be found ... in the crowds of ordinary, grass-root supporters" and "within a vast and largely unexplored working class literature", such as T. Wilson's Song of 1842 (p.247).

Also disappointing from the viewpoint of progress in Chartist historiography was A. M. Hadfield's Chartist Land Company (Newton Abbot, 1970). Her approach was narrative and factual, alongside wide generalizations. By 1846, for example, Chartism seemed "an old-fashioned, unsophisticated group and was slipping out of date as its points were taken over by the general movement of English opinion" (p.30). After an unsympathetic approach to O'Connor's philosophy and reasons for setting up the Scheme the remaining three-quarters of the book was devoted to a detailed description of the Land Company estates, largely based on the reports of the Select Committee set up to investigate the Land Company.

The emphasis was very much on details of O'Connor's finances and the approach was again negative - clearly evidence from such chapter titles as "Failures from Within" and "Disintegration and

the End". Some attempt was made to recreate the reaction of the allottees to the wonders of the cottages (p.101), and what it meant to own land after the trauma of factory life (p.106). No sociological analysis of the lists of workers and their occupations was made, however, as the emphasis was very much on the response of individuals rather than representatives of a whole society.

Hadfield concluded with an extremely Whiggish statement that "modern prosperity has made a good life for all country-dwellers, with an independence near to the dream that first inspired O'Connor" (p.176). The prosperous appearance of many of the estates today showed "the prosperity which has come since 1945 to villages throughout England, although the Land Company did not achieve it" (p.217).

David Jones' book Chartism and the Chartists, published in 1975, was perhaps the most positive, sympathetic and balanced of recent studies which have attempted a summary of recent research. The book was made even more useful by the provision of much new evidence.

A brief introduction of eight pages contained impressionistic views of Chartist attitudes towards the "Steam Aristocrats", as well as posing the familiar questions of the social composition of Chartism, the geographical location of its support and the variety of the Chartist response. An indication of the occupations of leading Chartists was provided by listing those of Chartists nominated to the General Council, taken from the Northern Star, 1841.

To Jones one of the key themes of the book was the real meaning of Chartism to its adherents - in his view (p.28) an "heroic struggle calling for prodigious dedication and energy". Dorothy Thompson and other "New Left" Marxists such as Rudé had modified the generalization of earlier Marxists, who viewed the masses as a faceless force, in the light of the work of social psychologists and sociologists. Similarly, Jones realised the importance of gaining insights into the motivation and feelings of rank-and-file Chartists and the need to study the quality of their lives and not mere economic indices. Jones, however, was also faced with the problem of gauging rank-and-file opinion.

The second main theme of the book was a comparative approach, comparing "Chartism as a national movement in relation to others" (p.29). Unlike Rudé, the emphasis here was on considering Chartism in the light of the broad policies of other national movements, rather than providing evidence of changing sociological patterns.

Jones divided the book into five major sections, each containing treatment of various aspects of Chartism. The approach was by topics rather than chronological. For reasons of space no detailed footnotes were used; the reader being referred to the bibliography.

The first section entitled "Chartism and Society 1836-48" dealt with Chartism and the early socialists, education, temperance and religion. The general tenor was positive throughout; thus he explained the depth of feeling of the Coventry

Chartist William Taunton who combined Chartism, Congregationalism and Owenism, in both deed and action, by pointing to the millennialism of Chartist methods and language (p.34).

More successfully than most writers on Chartism, Jones appeared to be making a conscious effort to present a balanced picture of the movement, as free as possible from value judgment, while attempting a genuinely empirical and eclectic approach. The whole of O'Brien's career was considered, for example, and it was pointed out (p.37) that he left Chartism mainly because of the latter's failure to embrace Owenite idealism rather than conversion to liberalism. Quoting O'Brien himself (p.38-39), Jones pointed out that it was the failure of Owenites to use forceful political action that most divided them from the Chartists although their idealism contributed much to the movement.

Jones, however, clearly indicated his basic sympathy with the Lovett and Vincent school of Chartism in his sections on the links between Chartism and education, religion and the temperance movement. His own Welsh nonconformist background and his research on Welsh Chartism³¹ tempered his views on these aspects of Chartism. Nevertheless he made no rigid division between Lovett's and O'Connor's views (p.43-44) but rather tried to portray the importance of education, for example, to rank-and-file Chartists (p.41). His treatment of temperance Chartism was similar - the National Charter Association recommended sobriety

³¹D. J. V. Jones, "Chartism in Welsh Communities", The Welsh History Review, vol.VI, no.3, 1973.

although "stubbornly refused to make total abstinence part of Chartist policy" (p.46). Throughout, the approach was positive: instead of the usual concentration on Henry Vincent's role as a divisive influence, the practical benefits of teetotalism were put forward (p.48), although Jones admitted that Vincent and his friends wanted (p.49) "to remove the fear of democracy amongst potential middle-class friends".

Jones made full use of recent work by Alex Wilson, Dorothy Thompson and W. R. Ward's Religion and Society in England, 1790-1850 (1972), for his chapter on Chartism and religion as well as older works by Faulkner and Wearmouth. Jones' approach was again sympathetic, and he pointed out that Cooper, Abram Duncan and other radical preachers "were fascinating and often complex individuals, "who personify the vital and organic link between politics and religion in the early Victorian period" (p.49). Jones clearly believed that historians have greatly underestimated the importance of religion to Chartism - doubtless reinforced by his knowledge of Welsh Chartism - and claimed that missionaries such as Vincent "played a vital role in creating a great popular feeling, and in giving it a Christian rationale" (p.50). Jones did, however, point out that George White, amongst others, bellowed against Christian Chartism arguing (p.57) that " 'Real Chartism is Labour against Capital' ". Jones perhaps underestimated the effectiveness of O'Connor's attack on Christian Chartism: certainly Faulkner believed indifference to religion to be widespread

amongst the rank-and-file,³² although only more detailed local research could confirm this.

In the section on Chartism and politics, 1836-1851, Jones again fully utilised recent work as well as older sources. Of great value was the continuous, although impressionistic, attempt to capture the impact of Chartist politics on the rank-and-file. O'Connor's effect on one George Wearth, for example, (quoted p.104) well captured the general effectiveness of Chartist propaganda on a mass audience.

Jones greatly rebuked both Rowe and Prothero (p.63) for arguing over the ideological origins of the Charter. Jones preferred to point out the gradual, eclectic manner in which Chartist ideology evolved from the 1790's; although he necessarily concentrated on leaders (pp.63-64).

Jones devoted generous space to the mechanics of Chartist organisation - the National Charter Association, the Chartist Clubs and Conventions. Unlike many writers, however, he attempted to portray the essence of their appeal rather than merely give details of location and membership. The social importance of Chartist clubs was well illustrated by two accounts from Ashton-under-Lyne and Calverton (pp.78-79). Similarly the importance of the public meeting as "the Chartist experience" was made clear. Jones realised the different mode of behaviour involved in meetings such as at Kersal Moor in 1839, compared to those of modern institutionalised politics and the greater social unity.

³² Above, p.68.

of a society only partly industrialised. Similar camp meetings were held in the North well into the 1850's, and the squabble over numbers attending between Chartists and their enemies - and indeed neo-Whig and New Left historians today - clearly indicated the tension involved (p.82).

Jones briefly sketched the importance of the Chartist press to the movement, although perhaps more illustrations of the crucial role of the Northern Star would have been useful. O'Connor, however, was sympathetically treated. He was described (p.110) as a "leader, prophet, teacher and treasurer of the movement", who "was determined to retain the image of a people's movement" (p.111) against élitest tendencies.

Almost alone amongst historians of Chartism, Jones took a favourable line on the Land Plan in the section entitled "Chartism and the Economy 1839-48". Yet again, the impact of the Plan on actual Chartists was emphasised rather than long lists of financial details and failings. The quotation from the Labourer showing the reaction of William Wright to being freed from the factory bell (pp.128-129) had more effect than pages of analysis. The dissolution of the Company was indeed "a tragic end to a splendid experiment" (p.137). Jones agreed with MacAskill and Hadfield that "p.133) "labourers, craftsmen and factory victims lived side by side in their sturdy " 'Chartist villas' ". Indeed, an analysis of members of the Land Company showed a greater proportion of labourers than did the N.C.A.

The relationship between Chartism and trade unionism was

studied and Jones pointed out (p.143) that "a series of local studies might well support contemporary claims that the success of one organization was related to that of another"; the "relationship between Chartism and other movements (being) a complex one" (p.144). Jones illustrated these and other statements by reference to the careers of leading Chartists such as James Leach, Sam Kydd and others.

Throughout the book the author successfully portrayed the fluid and often contradictory nature of Chartist political, economic and social thought. This was true of both their attitude to the middle class (pp.144-145), violence and foreign affairs amongst others. Jones pointed out that in the case of the latter two subjects in particular myths have obscured the truth - much local research being necessary before confident statements could be made (p.148). He followed Rudé and Thompson, however, in pointing out the role in lessening traditional folk violence with its "emphasis on discipline and national action" (p.152), while perhaps underestimating rank-and-file demands for forceful action and the effectiveness of the appeals for peace of such moderates as Lovett and Linney (p.151).³³

Jones rightly pointed out (p.169) that "our knowledge of later Chartism at a local level remains pitifully thin". Sources were, of course, more difficult to find with the demise of the Chartist press. The various indices of Chartist activity were

³³Cp. B. Wilson, p.13; Devyr and Peel, above pp.22-26.

also more difficult to isolate and quantify as the organised movement collapsed. Due to the lack of detailed research on this period, Jones was content to outline the national programme of "Charter Socialism" put forward in 1851, and the struggle of Ernest Jones to keep Chartism alive.

Jones concluded (p.181) that "Chartism in its ending and beginning was more than its organization". He viewed this, however, in terms of the continued influence of leaders such as Henry Thomas rather than the residual Chartism of the rank-and-file. The positive approach was retained, however, as Ben Wilson's recollection of a Chartist reunion in 1885 was cited as showing the strength of Chartist sentiments rather than the fact that they praised Gladstone and toasted in lemonade (p.182).

The book successfully brought out some of the reasons for Chartism's appeal to the rank-and-file and provided a succinct and sophisticated synopsis of the latest research into various aspects of the Chartist response. Jones especially stressed the importance of local Chartist leaders and showed the complexity of local Chartism.

Above all, Jones took a determindly empirical stand against both New Left or neo-Whig historians who had taken sides in Chartist ideological conflicts. He preferred to believe that support of Chartist churches, schools, halls and education were intrinsically linked to the militancy of George White and others and the outbreaks of violence: all were viewed as manifestations of a growing working class consciousness and "an integral part of the struggle for identity, dignity and improvement" of

ordinary men and women (pp.187-189). Chartist support for radical campaigns were not necessarily indicative of "embourgeoisment" but an indication of a growing independent working class view of society. Jones pointed to the degree of independence retained by Chartists throughout the period as proof (p.189).

By 1975, therefore, the growing disillusionment with both the social democratic politics of the British Labour Party, with its failure to solve basic economic and social problems, and the elitest authoritarianism of the Soviet regime, had led both socialist and Marxist historians to combine the concepts of economic determinism with a sociological approach concerned with emphasising the role of the rank-and-file and cultural factors in the Chartist movement. The combination of Marxism with empirical investigation and a sympathetic approach to the rank-and-file with all its inconsistencies, became a major feature of neo-Marxist and New Left historiography.

Jones' work showed this trend without a Marxist bias and attempted to embrace work by neo-Whig historians such as Brian Harrison and Alex Wilson, so making religious and temperance Chartism part of a genuine working class response, rather than proof of their inevitable need for middle class ideological leadership. All except neo-Whig historians wished to emphasise the political sophistication, determination, intellectual capacity, and self-sufficiency of the rank-and-file but lacked a systematic and structured method of assessing these qualities. Too often, like Jones, they had to be content with an impressionistic

approach backed by minimal sources. Although Jones had also emphasised the role of Chartist poetry as an indication of both rank-and-file opinion and as showing the importance of culture to the movement.

CHAPTER VII

Conclusions

Chartist historiography has made tremendous progress since the late nineteenth century, both in its methodology and the range of sources employed. The range of sources has widened from the Victorian historians' narrow selection of official sources to the modern historians use of ephemeral material such as broadsides, posters, pamphlets and even street ballad and other neglected forms of working class literature, alongside the Chartist memoirs, Chartist and local press, Home Office Papers and the Place Collection first used by Hovell and the historians of Columbia University during the First World War.

It has been shown that Chartist memoirs give a very valuable insight into the complexity of the roots of the movement and the varied and often contradictory influences which moulded the ideologies of its leaders. The use of these memoirs by historians has also often been very selective. Only in the past decade, for example, has Devyr's autobiography been widely used as he contradicted the general liberal milieu of most other memoirs.

The "Whig tradition" had a tenacious hold on British historiography and its influence continued even on Fabian historians such as Hovell, West and Tawney who had used new sources in a scientific manner. The historians writing both in America and Britain during the period of the First World War laid the foundations of basic knowledge about Chartism, but the latter never resolved

the duality between scientific empiricism and the Whig tradition of historiography.

British Chartist historiography until 1939 was characterised by its élitest attitude to Chartism: the role of leaders was emphasised - usually those of the Lovett school - and the rank-and-file were ignored or viewed as ignorant masses easily swayed and not interested in politics. Such writers, although making scientific use of sources, were very selective in their choice of material and any tendency in Chartism which did not fit their preconceived concept of the movement evolving as a precursor of the Labour Party was condemned as a "lost cause".

British historians, until 1939, were not greatly influenced by Weber, Marx or other pioneers of social sciences nor, indeed, by the positivist concept of history as a branch of science. American historians such as Rosenblatt, Slosson and Faulkner had incorporated such influences in their work, as the Marxist writers Rothstein and Groves but, in general, writing on Chartism until 1939 was in the Hovellian tradition, with source material remaining conventional.

Between 1939 and 1959 British historiography was deeply influenced by Namier. Historians appeared reluctant to study regional Chartism within the framework of social scientific terminology and used the biographical method instead. This approach also avoided the difficult problem of gauging the reaction of the rank-and-file to Chartism and of formulating techniques of using historical data - necessarily scattered and incomplete - according

to social scientific formula. Unfortunately, unlike Namier's subjects, Chartist leaders left few sources, and historians such as Saville and Schoyen had insufficient material to attempt Namierite political sociology.

Namierism had, in fact, been adapted by British historians of Chartism both to fit their own historiographical position and to facilitate the study of Chartism. The limitations of the biographical method for providing a more detailed analysis of Chartism had become obvious, and the publication of Chartist Studies in 1959 marked the start of the next phase of Chartist historiography. Although marking a great advance in the insight and depth provided, it remained disappointing in that most contributors used standard sources - often in an almost antiquarian form of narrative in many cases - and made little attempt to explain the nature of Chartism and quantify its impact on the working class as a whole. Too often, as with most historians since, Chartism was viewed solely through its leaders and in terms of the organized movement whose activities were reported in the press.

Since 1959, surprisingly few historians have made systematic use of even the framework of social sciences such as sociology and social psychology when writing about Chartism. Namier's "brute empiricism", unguided by any framework of sociology, increasingly came under fire from historians such as Carr, however, but only George Rudé specifically used comparative techniques of sociology and social psychology in comparing Chartism with other social movements.

Few historians have followed Rudé in his methodology. A division appeared between neo-Marxist historians who worked within a sociological framework in order to prove the growth of a working class consciousness, and neo-Whig historians who emphasised the role of the leadership and the organized movement and their close affinity to bourgeois liberalism. The latter writers usually dismissed the need for studying Chartist impact on the rank-and-file as they were only capable of being led by the élite of Chartists. The direction of this leadership was into eager cooperation with Gladstonian liberalism.

Future historians of Chartism will have to come to terms with many basic problems of Chartist historiography not yet satisfactorily solved. The exact nature of Chartism's appeal to the rank-and-file, the extent of this appeal and which aspect of the movement appealed most to which groups, are all questions which need to be answered. Too often, historians have measured the strength of Chartism solely in terms of the organised movement, as reflected in reports of official meetings and conferences and the activities of the leadership, rather than its total impact on the working class.

Benson has argued¹ that "a serious methodological gap ... exists in historiography that will require large-scale, sustained efforts to close." This is particularly true if remaining problems of Chartist historiography are to be solved. Historians, since

¹"An Approach to the Scientific Study of Past Public Opinion", p.527.

1959, have increasingly written within a framework of sociology or social psychology, often allied with economics. Unfortunately these efforts have lacked a systematic approach. Rudé and D. Thompson made use of sociological terminology to a limited extent in their studies of Chartist violence; Rudé, in particular, making good use of the comparative method borrowed from sociology. Few other historians have followed their lead and made explicit and systematic use of sociological terminology.

Many sociologists have emphasised the close affinity between their discipline and that of the historian. Berger has argued, for example, that "a humanistic understanding of sociology leads to an almost symbiotic relationship with history".² This did not mean, however, that statistical techniques should be denigrated. Berger believed that although statistical methods and a scientific, unbiased approach is vital for sociologists, this is not an end in itself. Statistical data, in his view, only became sociology when interpreted within a sociological framework of theory (p.22). This framework of terminology is, however, precise in definition; much more precise than most historians' use of such concepts as role, class, status, etc.

E. H. Carr had argued that objectivity in history is impossible and the historian can only aim towards that impossible goal. Berger put forward the similar idea that the sociologist, in spite of his use of statistics and allegedly precise methodology,

² P. L. Berger, Invitation to Sociology: A Humanistic Perspective (1966 edn.), p.31.

can only try "to control his personal preferences and prejudices" and "perceive clearly rather than to judge normatively" (p.28). Smelser has also pointed out that even ideologically committed historians, such as Marxists, can declare their bias and this need not necessarily interfere with the intellectual and technical integrity of his work.³

Chartist historians should, therefore, adopt a much more rigorous and systematic approach. They must admit to ideological bias and use sociological terminology with much more precision. When studying Chartist leaders or a small sample of the rank-and-file, for example, the precise use of the terms "role" and "status" could give deeper insights into their response to Chartism. The number of roles found in society is often a sound guide to the degree of social differentiation. A role is usually defined as the pattern of expected behaviour associated with a certain position in society. It can be ascribed or achieved: the former is not meant to change whereas an achieved role is gained by an individual. Individual status is associated with an achieved role, often reinforced by props and symbols. The gradual change in British society from one in which statuses were largely ascribed to one where status was largely achieved was taking place during the Chartist period at a greater rate than before. Such a concept could throw light on the behaviour of Chartist leaders and the division between artisans of the Lovett school and the rank-and-file.

³N. J. Smelser, History and Theory, Vol.5, No.2, 1966, 14-15.

Other concepts useful for the study of the impact of Chartism on a society in the process of rapid industrialization are those of "folkways" and "mores". William Graham Sumner argued that the former are customary ways of social behaviour, violation of which bring ridicule rather than sanctions, whereas "mores" are regarded as crucial for group welfare, violation of which brings punishment and are less liable to change than "folkways".⁴

A study of the "mores" and "folkways" of a regional, social or economic group would help with an explanation of their reaction to Chartism. In order to gauge the extent of this reaction, however, certain assumptions have to be made. The concept of social interaction presupposes collectively held values and means of communication and is a common experience for the participants. Interaction is preceded by culture - the product of historically past interactions which is modified by interaction. The sociologist seeks persistent structural features throughout this process, however complex and confusing this may seem.

In his article on analysing past public opinion, Benson quoted J. J. Honeyman's theory that "the members of any enduring group tend to manifest certain relatively common personality characteristics". Benson concluded that it was therefore unnecessary to count heads in order to be sure of rank-and-file opinion (p.535). The communities influenced by Chartism were either at a pre-industrial level of social and economic development, or were at a fairly

⁴J. B. McKee, Introduction to Sociology (Michigan, 1969), pp.85-86 and passim.

primitive stage of complexity regarding division of labour, the class structure and social interaction. Such societies were characterised by the dominance of family kinship groups, bound to traditional mores and values, although still differentiated by function and status. Communication in such societies was usually oral in nature and social control was effectively carried out by ridicule, gossip and ostracism. Communal feelings and experiences were therefore part of the experiences of such societies, as they are visible in the nationalist movement of Africa and Asia.

Most sociologists view people as largely the products of social organization. It would appear, therefore, that in the less complex society of the Chartist period, certain general inferences about the modal cumulation of personality characteristics can be drawn from the deficient and discontinuous data of the historian when studying the Chartist rank-and-file.

Historians of Chartism must therefore take full account of such sociological methodology in their study of the influence and strength of the movement, but not allow the rigidity of such a framework to lead them into selecting opinions and other data in order to fit, while ignoring those which do not easily fit the theory.

A much more systematic approach should be taken towards use of sources. Too often, historians have generalised from one dubious source. Benson has argued (p.556) that there are three distinct types of "historical opinion indicators" and general rules for their use can be drawn up, if it is realised an

historical document only becomes an indicator when an inference is drawn from it. In Benson's view, voting for public office was the best indicator of public opinion given the American political system. He divided the indicators into actions or events; expert estimates of the distribution of public opinion; and expressions of opinion (oral or written in origin). The last division would appear most relevant for the study of the Chartist rank-and-file: this included the private and public opinions of important Chartist leaders; representative Chartists from the main factions and regions; sensitive Chartists who appeared to reflect the opinions of their colleagues and the mass of workers; and the influence of the national, Chartist and local press.

If it is accepted that it is neither necessary nor possible to count heads nor carry out a statistically viable poll of Chartist opinion, the representative sample of rank-and-file opinion, or of sensitive men, should be given most emphasis and general inferences could be drawn within a sociological framework.

Those communities most unaffected by industrialism and exhibiting the pre-industrial social organization, modes and methods of communication, although in a period of rapid transition, would be more likely to provide the historian with the opportunity to make viable generalizations about rank-and-file reaction to Chartism from scattered data, than more diverse and complex urban communities, such as in the new industrial cities of the North. Similarly, regions such as South Wales and Cornwall, strongly

united ethnically and by nonconformity, have provided recent historians with opportunities for studying the reaction of a whole community to Chartism.

John Rule's study of "Methodism and Chartism among the Cornish Miners" (Bulletin of the Society for the Study of Labour History, No.22, Spring 1971), typifies the trend towards concentration on even smaller and closely defined Chartist areas and groups. Rule attempted to gauge the response of the whole community of Cornish miners to Chartism. Both the indirect evidence of full chapels and lack of Chartist organisation in Cornwall, and the opinions of "influential men" such as Chartist missionaries, were used to prove the weakness of Chartist feeling amongst rank-and-file Cornish miners. The Methodist press was also quoted to support the theory of the "Theodicy of Suffering", or the turning of deprivation "from finding expression in social discontent into a vehicle for personal redemption", by the use of Methodism. Rule finally cited geographical isolation and the strong influence of a paternalist aristocracy, alongside the lack of an identifiable capitalist class, as reasons for the persistence of the traditional food riot in bad times (p.9).

Rule's article touched on the problems of gauging rank-and-file reaction to Chartism, but it implied how this could be achieved without providing "a framework of analysis and a set of specific questions"(p.11). A more systematic approach both to source material - assessing its validity and pertinence - and to the use of sociological terminology in his description of

Cornish society and its reaction to Chartist ideas, would have provided a much more convincing study.

Comparative analysis of similar Chartist areas and groups, using both direct and indirect evidence within a sociological framework, should also relieve productive results. Rule's study, for example, was compared with work on Durham miners who supported both Methodism and Chartism in spite of their geographical isolation. Again, general conclusions can be drawn more safely from relatively homogeneous communities without advanced specialization of labour and a complex social structure.

In addition to more work following this approach, more exploration of the largely untapped sources of working class literature is necessary. This would include not only the stories and poems written for readers of both the Chartist press and the later popular dailies, but also folk songs which were sung to wide audiences in pubs and, like the stories and poems, were often handed down in the oral tradition from one generation to another.

An example of such a song was "Our Destiny", published in the Northern Star on July 11, 1846:

Labour ! Labour ! Labour ! toil ! toil ! toil !
 With the wearing of the bone and the drowning of the mind;
 Sink like shrivelled parchment in the flesh-devouring soil.
 And die, when ye have shouted it till centuries shall hear !
 Pass away unheeded like the waving of the wind !

Such songs were sold as broadsheets in streets and markets. The stories which appeared in the Labourer - such as that of "The Jolly Young Poacher" and the poems of Ernest Jones had a similar appeal,

often reflecting the views of readers. Jones' most popular poems - such as "The Song of the Low" - were made into folk songs and became an important part of working class life. Such songs were sold in the streets until the early years of the twentieth century.

Future historians of Chartism must therefore build upon the sound work of past generations and not only make use of new sources hitherto hardly touched, but also have the confidence to make full and systematic use of sociological methodology, while remembering they are dealing with "men and women of flesh and blood" and of infinite variations and be aware of the tendency of sociology to standardize and ignore the "lost causes" and exceptions of history.

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