HISTORICAL INTERPRETATIONS OF THE CHARTIST MOVEMENT

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PREFACE

The historian's "noble dream" of writing objective truth is always an ultimate for which to strive, but it is not a call for mere chronicling of the historical events. The "high function of the historian is interpretation."[1] Thus the study of history is also a study of the writers of history. A man does more than record facts when he tells of an event; he creates and conveys his own image of the incident to the reader. The words the author chooses, what he includes or excludes, are important. Each treatment reflects the author's personality, prejudices, preconceptions and purpose. Individuals may read the same facts, view the same conditions, talk to the same people and yet arrive at dissimilar opinions and explanations of the same occurrence.

The varying interpretations in history with emphasis on particular facets of an event or period result in better understanding and greater knowledge of the past. One historian will do research and emphasize one aspect, another historian another. In this manner the material is enlarged and diffused; our image becomes more complete. Even though some treatises may be incomplete, or perhaps even contain wrong emphases, they may contribute previously unknown information.

This study of the Chartist Movement, the English working class movement for political reform in the 1830's and 1840's, is an attempt to survey the major categories of historiographical approaches to the movement throughout the last century. Works and speeches of selected

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[1]James Westfall Thompson, A History of Historical Writing (New York, 1942), Vol. I, vii.

representative statesmen, writers and historians will be considered. Their major theses in regard to the movement will be presented with some attempt to deal with the determining factors in each author's interpretation, including the time of writing, the writer's background and purpose.

There are many individuals who have contributed to the completion of this research project and to the attainment of my degree. I gratefully acknowledge the efficient and effective assistance of my thesis committee. Dr. Homer L. Knight gave me personal encouragement, insight into English history, and helpful critical remarks and suggestions on the presentation of my material. Dr. Douglas D. Hale painstakingly corrected my copy for clarity, accuracy and organization.

Special gratitude is expressed to Dr. Theodore L. Agnew, my chief thesis adviser. His unbounded knowledge of history and research methods, superior ability in handling the written word, and unusual skill in counselling and advising students, never dominating nor confining initiative and personal style, made the writing of this thesis more a challenge, less a chore. The encouragement and aid of my family was also consistent and invaluable.

TABLE OF CONTENTS

CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION: A BRIEF SURVEY OF THE CHARTIST MOVEMENT

The "People's Charter," contrived in the minds of a small group of reform agitators in 1837, was first publicly read to a large gathering of working men in Glasgow on May 28, 1838. It was immediately and enthusiastically received. The document embodied all the major demands of the working class for broadening the base of English government to make it more responsible to the populace. These demands, or "the six points of the Charter" as they soon became known, included universal manhood suffrage, the secret ballot, no property qualifications for members of Parliament, payment of members of Parliament, annual elections, and equal electoral districts.[1]

Thomas Attwood, a popular reform leader of the working class, presented the Charter and followed it with a suggested plan of procedure for gaining the demands. A petition, carrying all the points of the Charter, should be drawn up and signed by the democrats throughout the country and presented to Parliament. Two or even three million signatures would be obtained, he predicted. If Parliament did not accede to their requests, there would be other petitions; and if the Legislature remained undisposed to the demands, there would be a "solemn and sacred strike from every kind

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[1]Robert George Gammage, The History of the Chartist Movement From Its Beginning Down to the Present Time (London, 1854), Appendix.

of labour."[2]

This was the first of many such mass gatherings and demonstrations that were to sweep the length and breadth of the British Isles, eventually gathering thousands under the all-inclusive standard of the Chartist Movement. Through this medium the reform fever reached the heart of the working classes, and from such repeated mass meetings it became all but epidemic.

These clamorings for reform were not a new phenomenon in nineteenth century England. The Reform Bill of 1832, for example, had been a result of such demands. The radical reform tradition in fact can be traced back to the reign of James I and the politico-religious struggles of Charles I and the Commonwealth. After the fall of the Commonwealth, an avalanche of Tory reaction submerged most abstract theories of political justice. In the mid-eighteenth century radicalism appeared with renewed vigor, stimulated by the presence of new political criticism and the widening gulf between the House of Commons and the people. During the second half of the century, programs for reform were planned and propagandized by active but relatively ineffective agitators. In 1744 a small group of Radical members in Parliament asked for the establishment of annual Parliaments, payment of Parliament members, universal suffrage, vote by ballot, and abolition of plural voting.[3] In 1780 the Society for Constitutional Information, led by Charles James Fox, drew up a program that included all the demands embodied in the 1838 "People's Charter." The agitation was abandoned in 1784, however, because of the

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[2]Ibid., pp. 27-29.

[3]Mark Hovell, The Chartist Movement (Manchester, 1925), pp. 3-6.

revolution in France.[4]

Parliament continually found Radicals in its midst. Early in the nineteenth century these Radicals were trying to abolish special privileges such as those of the Anglican Church, achieve complete free trade, and broaden the franchise. Most of them favored household suffrage, the ballot, abolition of the property qualification for the House of Commons, and shorter sessions of Parliament. While they were never numerous enough to form a ministry or even a separate political party, the Radicals were vocal in their criticism of the government and quick to contest Whig seats at elections, often voting against the ministry on important issues. Their leaders were most able, and they enjoyed widespread popular support, most of it unenfranchised, however.[5]

Thus the program expounded at Glasgow in 1838 was not new, but the purpose and supporters were. Down to the outbreak of the French Revolution the Radical philosophy had found its sole support in the middle class and the aristocratic circles. In reaction to the terrorism in France in 1793-1794, the respectable English Radicals lost all desire to expound extreme political theories; hence the radical program fell to the working class, in whose hands it remained for over forty years.[6] During the first two decades of the nineteenth century, however, the laboring masses saw little hope for improving their situation through political agitation. The poor laborers, suffering the dislocation caused by new machinery, the superabundance of labor, and the tremendous business

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[4]Frederic Austin Ogg, The Governments of Europe (New York, 1920), p. 81.

[5]Preston William Slosson, The Decline of the Chartist Movement (New York, 1916), p. 18.

[6]Hovell, pp. 6-7.

depressions and fluctuations, attempted rather to improve their condition through labor organizations and combinations. Their efforts toward unionization are exemplified by the combination of the cotton spinners of Lancashire into the Grand General Union of All Operative Spinners of the United Kingdom in 1829, the Manchestrian group called National Association for the Protection of Labor of 1830, and the Grand Trade Union of the same year.[7]

Undoubtedly the most important attempt to combine the power of the working class was the Grand National Consolidated Trades Union, founded in 1834 by Robert Owen. Originating from more than a mere desire to strengthen the bargaining power of laborers, it was Owen's unique answer to the exploitation of the worker by the capitalists. Substituting co-operative production for individual competitive production would make the capitalist unnecessary, he reasoned. The power of organized labor could bring about the transformation peacefully. Owen envisioned an England where the rich, realizing that the age of private property had ended, would form small self-directing communities. Then the workers, organized under the Grand National Consolidated Trades Union into their respective crafts and industries, would control the economic and political machinery of these small communities.[8] The picture held great appeal for the workers, and for a while Owen carried the unions with him. Soon the Grand National enrolled more than one-half million workers, and numerous local strikes were attempted. When most of the strikes proved disastrous, the movement lost momemtum before Owen's co-operative ideas

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[7]Ernest L. Woodward, The Oxford History of England, Vol. 13: The Age of Reform, 1815-1870 (Oxford, 1936), p. 122.

[8]Ibid., pp. 123-125.

could be given any trial. The death-blow to the Grand National came in March, 1834, when the government convicted and sentenced six laborers of Tolpuddle, Dorset, to seven years of transportation for administering illegal oaths in connection with union affairs.[9]

The disappointment caused by the collapse of the National Consolidated Union added to the other failures of union attempts to bring economic pressure on the capitalists. Although no more attempts to unite workers into a national trade union were made, labor agitation did not end. The dissolution of the Grand National contributed to the inauguration of a much smaller undertaking, the London Working Men's Association. The difference between the two was more than numerical; the change has been described as evidence of the gradual "evolution from voluntary communism to social democracy," that is, the abandonment of non-political Owenism and embracing the belief that political democracy must precede the attainment of equality and justice.[10] This new approach grew from the workingmen's dissatisfaction with the Reform Bill of 1832, the sentencing of the Dorchester laborers, and the passage of the Poor Law Act Amendment of 1834. To the worker these moves seemed to prove that the middle class was using its newly acquired political supremacy to further its economic interest at the laborer's expense. Without the franchise, therefore, he would continue to remain at the mercy of the middle class.[11]

The London Working Men's Association was founded for the purpose of

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[9]Ibid., pp. 125-126.

[10]Hovell, p. 52.

[11]Slosson, p. 19.

correcting this injustice. The Association came into existence in the summer of 1836 and was inaugurated by a small group of men who had been actively engaged since 1833 in agitation against newspaper taxes. They had recently won partial victory by gaining a reduction of the tax from four-pence to one penny, which meant that for the first time the working class could afford newspapers. The popular radical press was thus allowed to increase in number, a fact of utmost importance in the history of later agitation. At the end of their campaign against the tax, the participating agitators, Francis Place, William Lovett, Henry Hetherington, John Cleave and James Watson, decided to form some type of union exclusively for workingmen and thus combat the time-honored principle of looking up to the middle and aristocratic classes for leadership. Lovett, who was most responsible for the plan and program of the Association, stated that its objectives were "to draw into one bond of unity the intelligent and influential portion of the working classes ... [and] to seek by legal means to place all classes of society in possession of equal political and social rights." He hoped to create "a reflecting public opinion which would lead to a gradual improvement of the working classes without commotion or violence." Its methods were to include the promotion of a cheap and honest press and of popular education.[12]

The Association was most exclusive, admitting only genuine working men to membership, although it did give honorary memberships to favored middle class persons. Several Radical members of Parliament received such memberships, including Francis Place, James O'Brien, John Black,

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[12]William Lovett, Life and Struggles of William Lovett in His Pursuit of Bread, Knowledge, and Freedom with Some Short Account of the Different Associations He Belonged to and of the Opinions He Entertained (New York, 1920), pp. 92-93.

Feargus O'Connor, Robert Owen, W. J. Fox, and Dr. Wade, Vicar of Warwick. Even members of the laboring class were not admitted without careful inquiry, and many were rejected. Slowly, however, the Association launched a program of public agitation and lessened its educational activities.[13]

At first the Association merely appointed committees to study subjects of interest to the working class. One committee did a detailed study of the composition of the House of Commons and published in 1836 a report, The Rotten House of Commons,[14] that quickly became famous among the working classes. The report revealed the glaring lack of equal representation in the lower house of Parliament. Two other committees inquired into the conditions of silk weavers of Spitalfield and sent an address of sympathy to the Belgians as they attempted to establish autonomous government. Another committee, under the tutelage and chairmanship of Lovett, drafted the Address and Rules of the London Working Men's Association for Benefiting, Politically, Socially, and Morally the Useful Classes,[15] constituting an open invitation for workers throughout England to found similar societies. Assured that government could not withstand demands of educated people, they deemed their major concern to be political education.[16]

At a banquet given by the Radicals of Finsbury on February 15, 1837, it was decided that the time was ripe to arouse public opinion and intimidate Parliament by combining into a single bill the various reform proposals which had been discussed since 1832. The group appointed a

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[13]Hovell, p. 62.

[14]Lovett, pp. 102-104.

[15]Hovell, p. 62.

[16]Ibid.

committee of Radical Parliament members and Association members to draft such a bill. The finished document, the "People's Charter," did not emerge until the 8th day of May, 1838.[17] Its public debut on May 28, at Glasgow, was a successful one. In fact, the plan was so enthusiastically endorsed by the masses, that the temper of the agitation changed. From that initial meeting at Finsbury in 1837, when the Parliament members expressed their interest and promised to introduce the petition, the London Working Men's Association gradually abandoned its quieter methods of agitation. Making a widespread and public bid for the leadership of the working classes, it stepped up its missionary efforts.

From the earliest months of its beginnings in 1836, the Association received many requests for copies of its rules and requests for permission to set up branches of the organization. In 1837, they appointed a sub-committee to sent out information, and later dispatched "missionaries." Cleave was the first to be send; Hetherington and Henry Vincent soon followed. The "missionaries" helped to set up small "classes" of ten under the guidance of "leaders" appointed by the executive committee of the London Working Men's Association. This organizational structure and the designations were borrowed from the Wesleyan Methodists.[18] Extremely successful, the missionary tours added thousands to the movement, until by the end of 1837 the Association had 150 allied branches in all parts of the country.[19]

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[17]Elie Halévy, A History of the English People in the Nineteenth Century, Vol. III: The Triumph of Reform, 1830-1841. (New York, 1950), p. 292.

[18]Elie Halévy, A History of the English People in the Nineteenth Century, Vol. IV: The Age of Peel and Cobden, 1841-1860 (New York, 1948), p. 2.

[19]Halévy, The Triumph of Reform, p. 283.

The addition of the famous Birmingham Political Union was possibly the most important success of the year. Very active in the reform of 1830-1832 but since dormant, the Union, under its able leader, Thomas Attwood, rallied as Birmingham trade began to suffer and unemployment to increase. To Attwood the great illness of the English economic system was caused by Peel's Bill of 1819 which restored specie payments and resulted in sharp decline of prices. His panacea was to raise prices by issues of paper money. Within a few months, however, he found himself swamped by the ever-moving tide of suffrage agitation, and even his own local union became purely a society for the promotion of universal suffrage.[20]

Many factors other than the zeal of the missionaries and the addition of the Birmingham Political Union account for the growth of the Association. The trade boom was now over, unemployment was on the increase, a harvest failure began to be keenly felt, and the resentment toward the new Poor Law aroused the working class. This Poor Law Amendment Act of 1834, which gained quick acceptance by Parliament, provided for a new organization for administering poor relief and outlined principles on which it was to be granted. A Board of Guardians of the Poor controlled the local administration over a union of several parishes. The boards were elected by propertied voters since poor rates were levied only on buildings and lands. The control of the boards thus rested in the hands of the wealthy landowners, and the principles of administering the relief reflect the theories of Jeremy Bentham. The new law endeavored to isolate poverty and render it so uncomfortable and unacceptable

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[20]Ibid.

that the poor would become industrious enough to achieve self-sufficiency. Under the new system, relief was not to be offered to able-bodied persons and their families unless they entered a well-regulated workhouse. Hence the able-bodied worker on relief would be forced into a situation more wretched than the worst-situated independent laborer. To hundreds and thousands of working people relief had become the means by which they could increase their niggardly wages in order to exist. The workhouse now seemed to be the ultimate end for a large proportion of the working class.[21]

Agitation against the Poor Law, based on the writings and rebuttals of William Cobbett, a Radical member of Parliament, who had been one of the few to fight passage of the bill, began in 1836. In the beginning these Anti-Poor Law crusades were initiated and directed by the middle class. The leading personalities were Cobbett; John Fielden, son of a wealthy manufacturer, who considered himself an Owenite; Richard Oastler, also active in the fight against child labor; Joseph Stephens, son of a Wesleyan minister and interested in disestablishment; R. J. Richardson; William Benbow; James B. O'Brien; and Peter MacDouall.[22] Augustus Beaumont and Feargus O'Connor became the most noted of the Poor Law agitators. In 1837 the London Working Men's Association began establishing local groups for the sole purpose of fighting the new law, and Beaumont and O'Connor were sent from the capital to the North to organize this movement.

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[21]Hovell, pp. 78-80.

[22]Ibid., pp. 81-91.

[23]Ibid., pp. 92-93.

In most areas the Anti-Poor Law agitators succeeded in impeding the operation of the new system. After accomplishing this, they were unwilling to disperse; and thus, with the hope of gaining even greater control over their own destinies, most of them continued their efforts through Chartism. Much of the violence and uncontrolable fervor of the Chartist Movement resulted from this merger of Chartist and Anti-Poor Law forces, for the heavily industrialized North, led by some rather incendiary leaders such as O'Brien and O'Connor, added a tumultuous aspect to the movement.[24]

As word of the Charter spread, it swept aside all local and specific demands, such as factory reforms, currency reforms, and abolition of the Poor Laws and became the uniting force for the working classes. Local reform organizations and leaders embraced the program of the Charter, assured that their specific desires would be answered if democratic institutions were won. Although the various reform groups found unity of program and purpose in the statement of the Charter, there was no organization for unifying the grouping. The London Working Men's Association aided by working toward a National Convention to concentrate radical strength. Such a Convention, held August 6, 1838, officially established the Chartist Movement. The London Working Men's Association soon lost its identity within the larger movement, and for all practical purposes it ceased to exist. The Convention adopted the "People's Charter" and elected its official members.

The duly elected Convention met February 4, 1839. During the interim, increased efforts were made to publicize and obtain signatures for the

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[24]Ibid., p. 98.

petition. The varying backgrounds and desires of the members of the Convention became apparent early as dissentions and arguments boiled forth. Revolutionaries felt that since the Convention had been elected by a body of electors larger than the Parliamentary electorate, it was the true People's Parliament. Dr. Wade and the traditional Radicals became disgusted and resigned. Cobbett followed when the Convention refused to adopt a resolution declaring its purpose to be merely to supervise and promote the petition and not to compete with legal government. As a result of these defections the extremists were left in control of the Convention, but it never became an instrument of revolutionary conflict. Although on April 9 it did affirm the right of every Englishman to carry arms, the "physical force" faction of O'Connor and the Northern extremists was restrained by the "moral force" faction of Lovett and the old London Association followers.[25]

The Convention was slow and clumsy and denounced by many for its delays and cowardice. However, on May 7, it handed the petition, carrying 1,200,000 signatures, to Attwood and Fielden for presentation to Parliament. The Convention then moved to Birmingham, where it fell even more under the influence of the Northern extremists. The petition could not be presented immediately, since the dismissal of the Whig Government necessitated postponement. Convinced that their petition would never reach Parliament, many agitators wished to resort to arms. As threats and rumors of armed insurrections spread across the countryside, the government appointed Major General Charles Napier to provide protection for lives and property. Quietly and quickly he built up government

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[25]Halévy, The Triumph of Reform, pp. 312-320.

protection forces by supplying arms in the form of cutlasses to selected civilians.[26]

On July 12, 1839, after the new government had been formed, Attwood moved for a committee of the whole House to take into consideration the National Petition. The motion was overwhelmingly defeated. The Convention resorted to their last recourse, the "National Holiday." When trade societies refused their total cooperation, it amounted to little.[27] Riots and violence now became a part of the demonstrations as the frustrated and disappointed laborers resorted to what they considered to be their last recourse. There were rumors of strikes, insurrections and revolution. Ultimately, armed uprisings occurred in 1840-1841, and many of the leaders of the Chartist Movement were arrested for treason, sedition, and holding unlawful meetings. They were tried and jailed. This included Lovett, O'Connor, Place, and Vincent. They drew short terms, and all were released in the latter part of 1841 and early part of 1842. During the months of their imprisonment there was no unified Chartist effort, but following the release of the leaders, the Movement reached its highest peak. A second petition was circulated in 1842 and declared to hold three million signatures, a 160 per cent increase over the 1839 petition. In order to deliver this petition to the House of Commons it was necessary to break it in several pieces to get it through the door. It was presented to Parliament on May 2, 1842, and refused by the large majority of 238 votes.[28]

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[26]Hovell, pp. 136-142.

[27]Ibid., pp. 164-170.

[28]Julius West, A History of the Chartist Movement (Boston, 1920), pp. 182-185; Slosson, p. 61.

Thereafter the movement was all but dead. Then in 1847-1848 winds of revolution blew in from across the Channel and briefly revived Chartism. Once more the urban working classes attempted to pressure Parliament by petitioning. Again rumors of a revolution to support the petition circulated, but the thousands of demonstrators who accompanied the petition to the House of Commons dispersed quickly when confronted by the London police. Supposedly this petition carried over six million signatures. Clerks, hired by the Parliament, counted only two million, among which were such names as Victoria, Duke of Wellington, Sir Robert Peel, Pugnose, Longnose, Flatnose, Punch, and No Cheese.[29] After this fiasco of 1848 the movement lost the support of the masses. Remnants of the Chartist Movement existed until the early 1860's but with little support and no effective program.[30]

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[29]Gammage, p. 341.

[30]West, pp. 250-255.

CHAPTER II

CHARTISM: INTERPRETED BY ITS ENGLISH CONTEMPORARIES

The contemporaries of Chartism left to later generations numerous writings and records of the movement. These accounts are as varied as the authors. Each man reflected his class status, political leanings, and personal prejudices. Charles Kingsley and the Christian Socialists viewed the movement as a possible return to the gospel teachings, where class distinctions would be forgotten as humans showed Christian concern for one another. Benjamin Disraeli, in his early Parliamentary career, responded to the movement with a determination to protect the Chartists' constitutional rights, although he had little sympathy for their cause. Lord John Russell responded in a hostile fashion to the Chartists' attempts to usurp, as he regarded it, power from his Whig party. Thomas Carlyle used his history of Chartism, as he did most of his writing, to illustrate his ethical and moralistic philosophy.[1] The active Chartists wrote of their movement in terms of the particular phase in which they happened to be personally involved. The contemporary periodicals and newspapers tended to represent the varying political convictions to be found in British society.

Kingsley and Disraeli were not historians, and their writings are not historical studies; still, they played a large role in molding

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[1]George P. Gooch, History and Historians of the Nineteenth Century (London, 1928), p. 301.

contemporary and modern opinions of the movement. Even the writings of Thomas Carlyle on the subject of Chartism are of doubtful historical quality. Many claim his approach to be more akin to that of journalism than history.[2] Charles Kingsley was a minister, novelist, and columnist --an apologist for Christian Socialist philosophy. Disraeli, a novelist and politician, used his skill as a writer to propagandize for and protect ultra-Tory paternal government.

The activities and philosophy of the Christian Socialists and Charles Kingsley can be traced through the pages of the weekly publication, The Christian Socialist.[3] The publication carried the articles of "Parson Lot" (Charles Kingsley) which expounded the democratic character of Christian theology. Kingsley had little faith in the Charter as a political program but had every sympathy with the spirit of the movement, which he interpreted to be resentment of the working classes toward a social order that would do nothing for their betterment. A revolutionist in his economic convictions, he believed the laborers should work to aid and encourage voluntary associations among the working classes so that they might themselves produce and sell necessary goods without dependence on the middleman.[4] Politically, however, Kingsley was a conservative, believing that the doctrine of sovereignty of the people was atheistic and subversive.[5] He advocated concentration of reformist effort on the

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[2]Herman Ausubel, J. Bartlet Brebner, and Erling M. Hunt, (eds.), Some Modern Historians of Britain (New York, 1951), p. 35.

[3]Slosson, p. 172.

[4]Ibid., pp. 173-174.

[5]Harry Wellington Laidler, A History of Socialist Thought (New York, 1933), p. 633.

co-operative movement but not to the total neglect of the trade unions, friendly societies, and Chartism.[6]

Both Kingsley and Disraeli used the pages of the novel to relay their concepts of reform. Kingsley's Alton Locke, Tailor and Poet,[7] and Disraeli's Sybil; or Two Nations,[8] vividly describe the social and economic conditions in England in the late 1840's, and both called for quick and positive action. They of course differed on where the action should originate. Disraeli implied that the government should heed the warnings of the discontent that swept the land and act to allay it. Kingsley pleaded for voluntary Christian action and co-operation.

Alton Locke, published anonymously, called by Kingsley prior to publication an autobiography of a Chartist poet,"[9] contained Kingsley's personal estimation of the Chartist Movement. The tailor Locke, in attempting to stop a Chartist riot, was taken as one of the conspirators and thrown into prison for three years. After his release he contracted fever and in conversation with his nurse was asked if he still remained a Chartist. He responded by saying:

> If by a Chartist you mean one who fancies that a change in mere political circumstances will bring about a millennium, I am no longer one. That dream is gone--with others. But if to be a Chartist is to love my brothers with every faculty of my soul--to wish to love and die struggling for their rights, endeavouring to make them, not electors merely, but fit to be electors, senators, kings, and priests to God and to His Christ--if that be the Chartism of the future, then am I seven fold a Chartist, and ready to confess it before men, though I were thrust forth from every door in England.[10]

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[6]Slosson, p. 174.

[7](London, 1850).

[8](London, 1871).

[9]Robert Bernard Martin, The Dust of Combat: A Life of Charles Kingsley (London, 1959), p. 108.

[10]Charles Kingsley, Alton Locke, Tailor and Poet (London, 1850), p. 364.

While Disraeli's novel did not mention Chartism, his presentation of labor conditions gave moral support to their cause and publicized their needs. In the Preface of the 1870 edition, Disraeli wrote "in Sybil, I considered the condition of the people. At that time Chartist agitation was still fresh in the public memory, and its repetition was far from improbable."[11] For the writing of the novel he had at his disposal all the correspondence of Feargus O'Connor, and he visited and observed all the localities described in his book. "The work is an accurate and never exaggerated picture of the remarkable period of our domestic history," he declared in the Preface.[12]

The Parliamentary speeches of Disraeli in regard to the movement voiced the same demand for action, and were delivered with a terse and unmistakable flair. In a letter to his wife, written the day after the presentation of the first National Petition to Parliament by the Chartists, Disraeli boasted that he had "made a most capital speech on Chartism last night .... It was a most damaging speech to the government, and they didn't like it."[13] The speech dealt mainly with the misery and abuse suffered by the working class. He laid great stress on the irresponsibility of the Whig Ministry and expressed concern for the indifference of the government to working class grievances.[14]

Disraeli's political philosophy was grounded in the conviction that

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[11]Benjamin Disraeli, Sybil or Two Nations (London, 1870), p. 2.

[12]Ibid.

[13]William Flavelle Monypenny and George Earle Buckle, The Life of Benjamin Disraeli, Earl of Beaconsfield (New York, 1929), Vol. I, pp. 485-486.

[14]Hansard, Thomas C, The Parliamentary Debates, Third Series, (London, 1804, ff.), Vol. XLIX, cc. 246-251.

the spirit of the British aristocracy, "Regenerated Toryism," could and must weld all classes in the country into one national body under its leadership and control. While rejecting the Chartists' belief that universal suffrage alone would cure the social ills, Disraeli demanded that the government give due consideration to petition of grievances. He foresaw no great victory for the Chartists, declaring that "the time will come when the Chartists will discover that in a country so aristocratic as England even treason, to be successful, must be patrician. They will discover that great truth, and when they find some desperate noble to lead them, they may perhaps achieve greater results."[15]

The Conservative and Whig speeches in rebuttal to the Petition denied the contention that the Chartist grievances should be heard and that there was any need for change. They centered their remarks on the revolutionary economic aims voiced by the more radical Chartist leaders. Their arguments usually took one of two forms: that the Chartists were visionaries who held the erroneous idea that the possession of political power could alter the great unvarying laws of political economy in their favor, or that they were a party of revolutionists determined to use the Charter as a means to confiscate all property.

Lord John Russell, the spokesman for Whig forces in Parliament, often referred to as "hero of the Reform Bill of 1832,"[16] reacted to the Petition and to Disraeli's support in an stubbornly partisan manner. He had registered his opinion earlier that no further Parliamentary reform was needed, for the Reform of 1832 was a permanent and final achievement

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[15]Monypenny and Buckle, p. 486.

[16]Frank F. Rosenblatt, The Chartist Movement In Its Social and Economic Aspects (New York, 1916), p. 36.

with which it would be "unwise to tamper."[17] In 1838, as Secretary of State of the Home Department he pronounced the torchlight meetings of the Chartists illegal.[18] When Attwood introduced the 1839 Petition, Lord Russell quickly spoke out against it. The movement, he contended, was led by persons who in revolutionary language "not exceeded in violence and atrocity in the worse times of the French Revolution" called for the people to undermine the laws and resort to arms. He brought the fundamental principles of the Charter under attack, and scorned the idea that universal suffrage could establish general welfare in a country depending very much upon commerce and manufactures. No legal provision pertaining to representation could accomplish this goal, Lord Russell assured the Parliament. Look at the United States of America, he suggested; they have token universal suffrage, but they suffer from business fluctuations. Nor would he accept the Chartists' Petition as a national petition. The theories and desires expressed in the document belonged to a minority of "very designing and insidious persons," wishing not the prosperity of the people, but seeking to arouse discord and confusion. The petitioners, he said, wanted only to produce "a degree of misery ... [and] ... alarm that would be fatal, not only to the constitution, ... not only to those rights said to be monopolized by a particular class, but fatal to any established government."[19]

Russell persisted in explaining Chartism as an unnecessary and meaningless noise raised by people who could not, or would not, accept

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[17] Parliamentary Debates, Third Series, Vol. XL, c. 1192.

[18] Halévy, Triumph of Reform, p. 300.

[19] Parliamentary Debates, Third Series, Vol. XLIX, cc. 220-256.

the realities of economics. In 1839 he wrote in A Letter to the Elector of Stroud of

> ...the working classes who have declared their adherence to what is called the People's Charter, but few care for Universal suffrage, vote by Ballot, or Annual Parliaments. The greater part feel the hardship of their social condition; they complain of their hard toil and insufficient wages, and imagine that Mr. Oaster or Mr. Fielden will lead them to a happy village, where their labour will be light, and their wages high.[20]

Party and class loyalities also determined the interpretations given to the Chartist Movement by the contemporary journals and periodicals. The (London) Times, the largest circulating daily in Britain, spoke the mind of the conservative portion of the public. In reporting a mass meeting held to publicize the Charter on September 17, 1838, the paper indignantly stated that "to admit workingmen to Parliament would be to return to 'that savage nature in which the natural rights of men might be exercised by everyone who was strong enough to oppress his neighbor.'"[21] The Times reported that some four or five thousand attended the meeting, while Chartist publications and other favorable reports put the attendance at 30,000.[22]

The presentation of the 1842 Petition in Parliament and the demonstrations in its support received still more unfavorable consideration by the Times. The petitioners felt assured that this petition, signed by three million people, would be given solemn attention. Editorially, the Times stated the number of signatures was quite irrelevant. The question

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[20]Quoted in Slosson, pp. 28-29.

[21]Times, September 18, 1838, quoted in Halévy, The Triumph of Reform. p. 296.

[22]Halévy, The Triumph of Reform, p. 296.

to be settled, the paper insisted, was not how the people should be fully represented, but how they should be well governed. Further, the editors assured the readers, the "governments do not rest on the consent of the people, but simply on their own established existence--that the powers that be have a claim upon our allegiance because they are."[23]

The only reform agitation to gain the backing of the Times and its editor, John Walter, was the Anti-Poor Law Movement. At first the paper, and the Tory gentry for whom it spoke, welcomed the new Poor Law because the bill reduced taxes. By 1838 the new system was established in the agricultural south but caused great difficulty in the northern manufacturing areas. The Tories began to ally with the Anti-Poor Law insurgents against the common foe, the Whigs, and gradually the Times became the mouthpiece of the Anti-Poor Law agitation. Its purpose seemed to be to discredit the Whig administration rather than champion a needed reform, however.[24] The paper attacked Lord Russell with righteous indignation when he yielded to pressure by the manufactures and issued a proclamation forbidding torchlight meetings. Clearly this violated the Englishmen's right to assembly, the editors protested.[25] Later the arrest of Rev. Joseph Stephens, an active Anti-Poor Law organizer, added more fuel to their burning wrath. The editors violently opposed the arrest.

Throughout the agitation for the Charter, the Times systematically ignored the demand for universal suffrage and depicted the activities in

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[23]Times, May 3, 1842, quoted in Slosson, p. 62.

[24]Halévy, The Triumph of Reform, p. 288.

[25]Ibid., p. 300.

the North as exclusively an agitation against the Poor Law. While reporting the activities and programs of the movement with a fair degree of objectivity, editorially the Times never regarded the Charter or the Chartists as a true reform movement.

The ultra-conservative Blackwood's Edinburgh Magazine could find nothing in any of the working class reform activities to commend, not even the repeal of the Poor Law. The magazine shared the Times' delight in reflecting discredit on the Whig Ministry. In a lead article in April, 1838, Blackwood's accused the Whigs of adding to the obnoxious conduct of the "discontents of the working classes" by their speeches. The Whig's Reform Bill of 1832 "was vicious in principle and dangerous in tendency," and now they had gone even further and given encouragement to "popular encroachment" on the government.[26] The Ministry, said the article, contributed to the discontent by irresponsible language that attacked the Established Church in Ireland and the Attorney General, and by uttering "sneers at the House of Lords;" by showing sympathy to the "party in the state who advocates the prosecution of organic changes in the constitution;" and by the "countenance which they give to persons notorious for their violations of the law."[27] The article urged the Ministry to guard the constitution against any new disturbances, to enforce obedience to all laws, and to increase "dissemination of Christian instruction as the one remedy that should be applied to the disease," for the "Church and State, the observance of laws and the diffusion of religion, are the sum and substance of the British Constitution."[28]

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[26]"Discontents of the Working Classes," Blackwood's Edinburgh Magazine, XLIII (April, 1838), pp. 427-429.

[27]Ibid., pp. 429-431.

[28]Ibid., pp. 432-433.

The Chartists were banded together to obtain universal suffrage by use of terror, intimidation and violence, Blackwood's informed its readers in September, 1839. They desired only universal liberation from taxation and division of property. Only the "lowest," "most ignorant," and "most desperate of the kingdom" were involved. The magazine commended the Government for making sincere, though tardy, efforts to put down the Chartist agitation and demanded that the Government also put an end to the Chartist Convention. For six months this convention had night after night propagated "rank sedition" and "highest treason."[29] This Charter, if conceded, would establish a "Parliament of Paupers," the journal insisted.[30] This would be disastrous since "what the working class understand by political power is just the means of putting their hands in their neighbor's pockets."[31]

Blackwood's Magazine even questioned the advisibility of the Whig Ministry's recognizing the existence of the Charter. Its recognition of the name gave to the pamphlet the appearance of a solemn instrument coming from some kind of authority, and representing some national interest. The Prime Minister also came under fire for having received a delegation of workers on July 9, 1842, and the paper remained confident that he would not so lower himself again.[32]

The Chartist Movement, as depicted by Blackwood's, consisted of a

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[29]"The Chartists and Universal Suffrage," Blackwood's Edinburgh Magazine, XLVI (September, 1839), pp. 289-294.

[30]"The Riots," Blackwood's Edinburgh Magazine, LII (September, 1842), p. 411.

[31]Blackwood's, XLVI, p. 301.

[32]"Anti-Corn-Law Deputation to Sir Robert Peel," Blackwood's Edinburgh Magazine, LIII (August, 1842), pp. 272-273.

rebellious and revolutionary minority of immoral persons attempting to ruin all established law and property in England. Full responsibility for the growth of the movement lay with the Whig Ministry due to its "exaggerated expectations and unbounded promises" held forth during the 1832 Reform agitation and to the "strenuous efforts which they have ever since made to prevent an extension of the religious institutions of the country."[33]

The Whigs, however, were not without defense, since The Edinburgh Review adequately represented the cause. It gave full support to the administration's new Poor Law, maintaining that all "systematic relief of the poor ... is an interference with the natural order of society as resting upon the institution of property .... It abrogates the temporal punishment for vice, indolence, and improvidence ... [and] ... weakens the motives to exertion, frugality, self-denial, and foresight."[34] The Review argued that no legislation would improve the working class position. The only answer was intellectual, religious, and moral education of the working classes that they might form better habits and sounder opinions for these would be the principal causes of their economical improvement.[35]

Above all else, The Edinburgh Review saw the Charter agitation as obstacle to practical reforms. It would be possible for the Chartists to secure their ends perhaps but never through their adopted means. The six points of the Charter were neither necessary for the attainment of

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[33]Blackwood's, XLVI, p. 294.

[34]"Legislation for the Working Classes," The Ebinburgh Review or Critical Review, 83 (January, 1846) No. CLXVII, p. 83.

[35]Ibid., p. 94.

good government nor the shortest way to attainment. All governments would listen to reasonable claims.[36] The quarterly urged the Chartists to study the history of the Anti-Corn Law agitation which conveyed a worthy example. That movement confined itself with unswerving control to one object, a practical, economical reform, which effected directly and powerfully the most intimate interests of the people. They attained their goal, while on the other hand, the Charter only delayed Parliamentary enactment of reforms. Their agitation diverted the attention of the people from the accessible to the inaccessible, the Edinburgh told the Chartists.[37]

The Quarterly Review counteracted the Edinburgh's Whiggery by assuring its readers that if a Conservative Ministry were in office and were to allow riots to occur in the towns and then to kill several rioters in a feeble attempt to quiet the demonstrations, the Whigs would quickly declare it governmental negligence. The whole problem was one of dereliction of duty and inability to exert the power of the law by the government, because the Chartists were only misguided lawbreakers, declared the Review.[38]

The Chartists themselves supplied the most detailed and at the same time the most prejudiced accounts of the movement. The various factions of Chartism had their own organs of communications. Some of these papers were of sound quality and lasted for several years, others were short-lived, poorly-written tracts. These periodicals made no effort to achieve

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[36]"Electoral Districts," The Edinburgh Review or Critical Review, 95 (January, 1852) No. CXCIII, pp. 242-243.

[37]Ibid., pp. 244-245.

[38]"Sketches of Popular Tumults," Quarterly Review, LXV (December, 1839), No. CXXIX, pp. 295-296.

objectivity, but were founded to serve as a sounding board for the convictions and theories of the writers and editors.

Other than these publications, produced in the heat of the reform conflict, Chartist definitions and assessments of their movement are available in the autobiographies of its leaders and in compilations of their writings. R. H. Gammage, a member of the executive committee of the Chartist Convention, was the first to produce a history of the movement in 1854. William Lovett's Life and Struggles, was completed in 1870, and the writings and speeches of Ernest Jones were published in 1952. These three works provide a striking example of the diversity in the philosophies and personalities of the Chartists.

Robert H. Gammage was a native of Northampton. When he was only twelve his father died, leaving his mother with five children and a future of struggling against severe poverty. Apprenticed to a coach trimmer, Gammage first heard the principles of democracy from fellow workers. At the age of seventeen he became a member of the London Working Men's Association and enthusiastically worked for the adoption of the Charter, lecturing and aiding in the organizing of Working Men's Associations. In the latter years of Chartism he became involved in a personal and bitter feud with O'Connor and Ernest Jones.[39]

Jones, born in Berlin in 1819, was reared and educated in England. His father was a major in the British army and his mother the daughter of a well-to-do Kentish landowner. Directed by his father, Ernest's education included intensive attention to languages. Showing an outstanding literary aptitude and ability very early, he published prose and poems

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[39]Gammage, pp. 411-412.

while still quite young. Later, however, he entered into the study of law and was called to the Bar in April, 1844. His years of activity and leadership in the Chartist Movement were the years following the Petition of 1848.[40]

Jones' interest in politics appeared to date from the autumn of 1844, when he purchased Kearnsey Abbey in Kent. Some speculated that this move was made to prepare for a Parliamentary seat. However, the purchase resulted only in his financial collapse. This failure, some suggest, can be credited with his conversion to political radicalism. In September, 1845, Jones accepted the position of secretary to a railroad company, and about the same time he became attracted to radical politics. His own account says that "In the winter of 1845, having accidently seen a copy of the Northern Star, and finding the political principles advocated harmonised with my own, I sought the executive and joined the Chartist Movement."[41]

Lovett was a Cornishman who migrated to London in 1821. From about 1825 he was actively engaged in the manual trades. He personally experienced the displacement caused by the factory system: when competition from a new trade threw him out of work; he found it impossible to join a union for protection because he had not served an apprenticeship. He worked as a craftsman, coffee-house keeper, agitator, journalist and schoolmaster. He saw from the inside almost every popular movement of the 1830's and 1840's as a member and later President of the Cabinetmaker's

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[40]John Saville (ed.), Ernest Jones: Chartist, Selections From the Writings and Speeches of Ernest Jones With Introduction and Notes (London, 1952), pp. 9-15.

[41]Ibid., pp. 15-16.

Society, store-keeper for the first London Co-Operative Trading Association, secretary of the British Association for Promoting Co-Operative Knowledge, a member of the Grand National Consolidated Trades Union, founder and secretary of the London Working Men's Association, secretary of The Chartist Convention in 1839, secretary of the National Association for Promoting the Political and Social Improvement of the People, and a delegate to Sturge's Complete Suffrage Conference in 1842.

Several facets of Lovett's character and experience greatly influenced his view of the movement. First, Lovett spent his adult life in London and was inclined to view England with a Londoner's eyes. Further, being a skilled craftsman, a member of an exclusive trade union, Lovett was not actually of the factory system. He could not know industrial England with its masses of miners and cotton operators of the North, without organization or tradition, crowded into towns no better than mining camps. The great difference between O'Connor's view of England and that of Lovett's explain the difference in their interpretations of Chartism.[42]

Lovett's major concern was that the working men should gain political rights. Knowing that political power was won and successfully executed by informed and reasoning people, Lovett dreamed and worked for an educated working class. This process of gradual education and assumption of political prominence would eventually elevate the position of the workers. He was occasionally forced to suggest more aggressive measures, but they were alien to his character and philosophy. As the most prominent leader and organizer of the London Working Men's Association in

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[42]Lovett, pp. v-vii.

1836, Lovett defined the purpose and intent of the association to be the promotion of working class unity and education. The Association hoped to create "a reflecting public opinion" which would lead to a gradual improvement of the working classes "without commotion or violence."[43] He insisted that the Association should concentrate on securing political reforms and not be "led away by promises of repealing the detested Poor Law, or any of the other infamous laws which Whig and Tory have united to enact, ... unless the promise be accompanied by the pledge of universal suffrage, and all the other great essentials of self-government."[44]

The manifestoes and addresses written by Lovett during his active years in the London Working Men's Association and the Chartist Movement give a clear indication of his personal views of Chartism. Briefly, the major content of the writings can be stated in four fundamental ideas.[45] First, Lovett believed social evils to be the consequences of social institutions; transformation of the institutions was necessary to alleviate the evils. "When we investigate the origin of pauperism, ignorance, misery and crime we may easily trace the black catalogue to exclusive legislation."[46] The second principal contention was that the cause of social evils is government by a political oligarchy interested only in perpetuating the unjust privileges. The remedy, Lovett proposed, was political democracy, a Parliament selected from the best of every class, desiring the happiness of all.[47] He argued that manhood suffrage was a

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[43]Ibid., pp. 59-61.

[44]Ibid., p. 122.

[45]As outlined by R. H. Tawney in Introduction to Lovett, Life and Struggles.

[46]Lovett, p. 266.

[47]Ibid., pp. 119-120.

natural right since the government is for the benefit of all. The Chartists were not impracticable schemers, he argued, for the principles of the Charter were the laws and customs of their ancestors.[48] They did not want equality of political rights in order to "lop off an unjust tax or useless pension, or to get a transfer of wealth, power or influence for a party," but only to effect a probe of social evils and create remedies to unjust laws.[49]

Since he believed education to be necessary for genuine democracy and emancipation, Lovett declared that the first duty of the reformers was to work for the creation of a national system of education. This third principle was made very explicit in an "Address on the Subject of Education" in 1837; Lovett called the workers "to prepare their minds to combat with the errors and enemies of society .... Think you a corrupt Government could perpetuate its exclusive and demoralizing influence amid a people thus united and instructed?"[50] He accused the governing classes of purposely making knowledge accessible only to the rich and protested that education was "not a charity, but a right, a right derivable from society itself .... It is the duty of the Government to provide the means of education for the whole nation."[51]

Lastly, Lovett felt that the cause of democracy was international. The London Working Men's Association was the first English organization to produce manifestoes for foreign consumption. Since the governments of Europe were in common league to suppress all movements for reform, the

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[48]Ibid., p. 217.

[49]Ibid., p. 97.

[50]Ibid., pp. 94-99.

[51]Ibid., p. 142.

workers should likewise feel some common unity and cause, Lovett reasoned. In 1837 the London Working Men's Association published an "Address to Working Classes of America" which began: "Citicans of the American Republic. We address you in the spirit of fraternity which becomes workingmen in all the countries of the world ... the tyrants of the world are strong, because we, the working millions are divided."[52] One year later they addressed a manifesto to the "Working Classes of Europe and Especially to the Polish People," proclaiming "Fellow-producers of Wealth! Seeing that they are powerful through your ignorance, why should not we unite to teach our brethren a knowledge of their rights and duties?"[53]

Although Lovett's emphasis was for education and political reform, he was not silent on the questions of policy that divided and worried the Chartist Movement. He addressed himself to the two prevalent questions: the nationalization of land, and the division of the movement into a physical-force and a moral-force camp. In the land controversy, Lovett did not share the O'Connor's desire to see the land nationalized, but felt that there should be a free trade in land with co-operative or individual farming to be decided on the basis of whichever seemed advisable. Nationalization would create problems, he wrote, for it would necessitate indemnification to present landholders, which could only be done by an enormous addition to the debt. Moreover, the State would be an "indifferent landlord," and the funds derived from land ownership would make the state independent of the people and create many governmental officials. Further, he rejected the communistic programs, such as that of Jones, arguing that if the land should belong to and be administered solely by the commune, it would only be a "reduction of the evil within narrower limits;

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[52] Ibid., p. 132.

[53] Ibid., p. 160.

and from what we have hitherto experienced of municipal and parochial government in minor affairs, it does not augur much in favor of communal government for such a purpose." What was needed, he stated, was a useful kind of co-operation where the capital and labor would be combined to establish a unity of interests rather than a conflict.[54] He never attempted to outline the specific program the Chartists should follow in accomplishing this task, however.

Although he provided the sustaining spirit of the "moral force camp" of the movement, Lovett did not reject all physical and practical policies in his approach to Chartism. He certainly preached moderation and patience, convinced that "Whatever is gained in England by force, by force must be sustained; but whatever springs from knowledge and justice will sustain itself."[55] But he was willing to entertain the possibility of physical action as the last weapon of defense. He was secretary of the drafting committee for the "Manifesto of Ulterior Measures" that was drawn up immediately after the submission of the National Petition to Parliament in 1839. The manifesto labeled the government of England a despotism and called the industrious classes slaves. "We have resolved to obtain our rights," the document declared, "peaceably if we may, forcibly if we must; but woe to those who begin the warfare with the millions, or who forcibly restrain their peaceful agitation for justice."[56]

O'Connor would later use Lovett's authorship of this manifesto in an effort to brand Lovett a revolutionary. After his release from jail, Lovett tried to counteract the impression of violence conveyed by the

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[54]Ibid., pp. 436-437.

[55]Ibid., p. 197.

[56]Ibid., pp. 212-219.

"Manifesto of Ulterior Measures." He did not disclaim the hand he had in the writing of the document but admitted it was an act of folly. By way of rationalization, he wrote that he "sacrificed much in that Convention for the sake of union and for the love and hope I had in the cause, and I have still vanity enough to believe that if I had not been imprisoned I could have prevented many of the outbreaks and follies that occurred."[57]

Gammage was not the theorist that Lovett was, being only a worker in the ranks of Chartism. And although he made great claims of objectivity in the Introduction of his study of the movement, his views were definitely colored by personal prejudices. This is understandable, for he devoted many years of his life to the cause and felt that it was of high merit. To be sure, he spoke of the weaknesses of the movement, poor leadership and irresponsible propaganda, but he hastily added that none of this was enough to justify contempt or promote ridicule. Nothing, it seemed, really weakened the force of right that he found in the movement. The Government, Gammage's villian, armed the middle and upper classes against the Chartists[58] and sent the police in to break up Chartist meetings, giving no consideration even to women and children. He called the action a "brutal and unjustifiable onslaught upon the unarmed multitudes."[59] The Government's supreme indifference "assured the Chartists that nothing short of bloody revolution could ever enable the people to wrest their rights from their oppressors."[60]

Gammage stoutly maintained that the political question was not the

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[57]Ibid., pp. 212-215.

[58]Gammage, pp. 107-108.

[59]Ibid., p. 143.

[60]Ibid., p. 156.

Chartists' only concern. Political reforms were valued as abstract justice, as a means of securing a better social position for the working classes. He doubted if there ever were a great political movement of the people without social origins since the chief desire of man, he wrote, is to possess the means of social enjoyment. Social wrongs taught the masses the value of political rights; the masses contrast the conditions of the enfranchised classes with their own; reasoning from cause to effect, they arrive at the conclusion that the deprivation of political power is the cause of the social anomalies.[61]

Gammage defended physical force as a necessary tenet of Chartism. However, the division within the movement proved unfortunate, playing directly into the hands of the middle class, as each section weakened and destroyed the power of the other. Governments are necessarily institutions of force, both moral and physical, he insisted. In establishing the laws governments use moral precepts, but for the enforcement of those laws physical power is necessary.[62]

Gammage's personal esteem for the Chartist Movement is most apparent in his discussion of the relationship and interaction between the Anti-Corn Law League and the Chartists. The middle-class manufacturers used the repeal of the corn laws as bait to draw the people from their movement for suffrage, he wrote. They knew that the Charter meant the end of the reign of social monopoly. They wanted to divert the people's attention to only one monopoly--that of the landlords. Describing the corn laws as the one great source of social misery of the working classes, the manufacturers pictured the repeal of those laws as the panacea for all

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[61]Ibid., pp. 14-15.

[62]Ibid., pp. 95-96.

ills, while they told the people they had no objection to the Charter, in its proper time. But the Chartists did not fall for the bait, Gammage claimed, since they were able to thwart the corn law repealers in most all their efforts. Most authorities agree the Anti-Corn Law League did irreparable damage to the Chartist cause by siphoning off many of their leaders and masses of their followers, luring them with a promise of cheap bread. Not so Gammage, who contended that the Chartists drove "the Free Traders into holes and corners."[63]

Gammage published his study in 1854, when Chartism was still a live and somewhat active force in England. He concluded his book with an appeal for the working men to learn from the "failings" of some of the Chartist leaders, undoubtedly referring to O'Connor, who Gammage felt had "wrecked" the movement. Imitate their virtues rather than their weaknesses, he counselled. He considered the wrecked cause as still a noble one and one which would again revive.[64]

Jones, of all the Chartist leaders, most nearly approached a Marxist position.[65] From his earliest Chartist career, the influence of Marx and Engels on his developing socialism was decisive. At first the influence came through Julian Harney, a fellow Chartist, who had for several years been an admirer of Marxian thought. Later Jones knew and corresponded with both Marx and Engels, and at the same time remained in close contact with the émigré German movement in London. The ability to speak and read German fluently allowed him to become acquainted with the leading ideas of the Communist Manifesto. Other than Harney, Jones was

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[63]Ibid., pp. 113-115.

[64]Ibid., p. 442.

[65]Saville, p. 82.

probably the only Chartist who read and concurred with the German socialists and attempted to apply their ideas to the particular problems of the English workers.[66]

Jones's statements defining and clarifying Chartism reflected his gradual involvement in Marxian theories. His first public statement of Chartist principles was more radical than socialist, dealing with abstract ideas rather than programs and policies. He stated:

> It is because I wish to see a government that governs for the general good, instead of individual interest--a House of Commons that shall represent a people instead of a party--a church that shall be something more than a portion for the younger sons of titled houses--in time a liberal democracy instead of a tyrannical oligarchy, and it is because I believe the People's Charter alone calculated to ensure these results that I am desirous of becoming one of your delegates.[67]

In January of 1847, Jones became joint editor with O'Connor of The Labourer. This publication devoted most of its columns to the discussion of the aims and objects of the land movement.[68] In June, 1848, Jones was arrested and charged with seditious behavior and unlawful assembly. After spending two years in prison, he returned to his Chartist activities and began publishing his weekly Notes to the People.[69]

The Notes to the People contain the essence of all Jones's personal interpretation of the Chartist Movement. Many of the ideas and even the phrases are Marxian in origin. In one article he assured his readers that "the capitalists of all kinds will be our foes as long as they exist ... therefore they must be put down .... We must have class against

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[66]Ibid., pp. 26-27.

[67]Northern Star, May 9, 1846, quoted in Saville, p. 19.

[68]Saville, p. 24.

[69]Ibid., p. 46.

class ... all other mode of proceeding is moonshine."[70]

Apparently Marx and Engels recognized Jones's ability to popularize their theories in England. Their letters reveal that they regarded him as their best channel to the minds of the English working masses and hoped to use his ability. Engels, for example, wrote to Marx on March 18, 1852:

> From all I see, the Chartists are so completely disorganized and scattered, and at the same time so short of useful people, that they must either fall completely to pieces and degenerate into cliques ... or they must be reconstituted on an entirely new basis by a fellow who knows his business. Jones is quite on the right lines for this, and we may well say that he would not have got on the right road without our teaching, for he would never have discovered how the only basis on which the Chartist party can be reconstituted, namely the instinctive hatred of the workers for the industrial bourgeoisie.[71]

They continued to maintain contact with Jones and his work, with some 132 letters passing between Marx and Engels between the years 1847 and 1854 making direct reference to Jones.[72]

The necessity of systematized organization for the achievement of scientific socialism filled Jones's messages to the populace. The last letter he wrote to the Chartists before his trial declared that they had one duty, and that was to organize. And in the Northern Star on April 8, 1848, he stressed the need for organization since "without it a people is a mob: but with it becomes an army."[73]

The importance of economic factors also received more attention in Jones's consideration of the origin and purpose of the movement than in

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[70] Notes to the People, Vol. I, p. 342, quoted by Saville, p. 172.

[71] Saville, p. 40.

[72] Ibid., Appendix.

[73] Ibid., p. 28.

either Lovett's or Gammage's. He believed that the working classes had little sympathy with the struggle for political rights unless they could foresee results in social benefits. Assured that the masses did not fully understand the link between political power and social reform, he felt it necessary to hold up "the Big Loaf" beside the "Cap of liberty."[74] Trade unions and co-operatives would not secure this "Big Loaf" or any advantage for them since they were "lamentable fallacies" and "misdirections of time, means and energy."[75] Only an effective national organization could bring victory; thus all needed to combine under the banner of the Charter.

The land should be nationalized, Jones agreed, but only on a national basis with national planning and execution. The large farm system when properly carried out proved a "thousandfold" better than the small farm system, he contended, and the farms should be owned by the State and managed by the people. The ultimate goal was to be the bringing of large masses of labor power to the appropriate masses of land. The problem as it existed was that large farm systems had capital but employed little labor, while the small farm suffered from a lack of capital. The two must be combined, Jones urged, and it must be done nationally, not on the small Owenite community basis.[76]

The call for the "Big Loaf" and the nationalization of land represented a more revolutionary Chartism than had been envisioned according to Jones's first utterances. As he said in October, 1850, soon after his release from prison:

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[74] Northern Star, August 10, 1850, quoted in Saville, pp. 111-112.

[75] Notes to the People, Vol. II, p. 976, quoted in Saville, pp. 194-195.

[76] Notes to the People, Vol. I, pp. 251-257, quoted in Saville, pp. 144-145.

> I went into your prison a Chartist, but ... I have come out of it a Republican. You may tell them, in the speech for which you arrested me I spoke of a green flag waving over Downing Street. I have changed my colour since then --it shall be a red one now.[77]

The meaning of Chartism, therefore, not only differs from Chartist to Chartist but often changes in that meaning are readily discernible in an individual's definition as he and the movement matured.

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[77] Northern Star, October 26, 1850, quoted in Saville, p. 113.

CHAPTER III

CHARTISM: THE SOCIALISTS' INTERPRETATIONS

The diversity seen in the contemporary accounts of Chartism is only compounded and multiplied by the later writings about the movement. The contemporaries who saw, knew, or read first-hand of the Charter agitation differed on the essence, procedure, aims, and outcome of the working-class demands. So did later historians; and so do they yet. Subsequent interpreters of Chartism fall into three general categories: historians who have presented Chartism as an example of class conflict with revolutionary tendencies based on an unhealthy distribution of wealth; those who gave major emphasis to political factors and implications of the movement; and those who emphasized the social discontent and upheaval of the times and their contributions to the rise of Chartism.

One of the most important factors in the shaping of all historical literature after the middle of the nineteenth century was the same universal phenomenon that produced Chartism itself--industrialization.[1] The advance of modern technology and the material progress of the nineteenth century had profound effects not only upon history but also upon the writing of history. Thus during the second half of the century there developed a more scientific, critical, and scholarly approach to historiography and a move toward specialication. Historians began to deal with either cultural, political, economic, religious, or social forces and institutions in history.

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[1]James Westfall Thompson, A History of Historical Writing (New York), 1942), Preface.

The machine age, with its urbanization, "proletarianization," scientific methodology, and tremendous economic pressures, gave the greatest impetus to the economic considerations in history. Resulting in the rise of a new school of historiography usually designated as "historical materialism,"[2] this embraces the interpretations that dwell on the importance of economic factors on the political and social structure of society.

The ultimate expression of this historical materialism is found in the writings of Karl Marx and Friedrich Engels. Marx's theory of scientific socialism and his dialectic method were not the first to emphasize economics as the greatest determinant of the course of history, but there can be little doubt that his system sharply challenged the prevailing historiography and influenced most pointedly the development of social and economic history. Many later historians acknowledged a great debt to Marx for his pioneering of economic determinism in human history, although they rejected his rigid Marxian theory.[3]

This interest in economic and material influences on political and social institutions gained a new following in the early twentieth century, when many Englishmen became concerned with the effects of industrialization upon their society. The machines that were to have produced luxuries and to have provided a better life for all had in fact reduced many to slave labor, and these unfortunates reaped none of the awards of mechanization. Many began to apply the theories and philosophy of the English and French Utopian Socialists, Christian Socialists, and Marxian Scientific Socialists to a reevaluation of all history and to propose great

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[2]Fritz Stern (ed.), The Varieties of History From Voltaire to Present (New York, 1956), p. 145.

[3]Ausubel, p. 327.

changes for the future. Chartism, as a working class movement, received much attention from these new socialists, for in the history and program of this labor agitation they found expression of their own socialist themes. And although the People's Charter was political in its demands, many elements of Chartism lend themselves to a socialist interpretation.

The physical conditions of the English working classes in the early nineteenth century were unbelievably bad, and the reforms demanded were to ultimately relieve these conditions. The earlier attempts of the working class to better their situation through trade unions relied solely on economic pressures. There is much to support the contention that class consciousness was fairly well developed. Without exception the leaders of the Chartists considered themselves working men, and were regarded as such by their followers. Laboring men manned the movement, with the exception of honorary members and an infiltration from the Anti-Corn-Law League. Repudiation of the Reform Bill of 1832 by the Chartists, which may be regarded as a complete breach with the middle class, exemplifies the existence of class divisions.

Many of the Chartists' writings and speeches also support the view of Chartism as a result of economic factors and a step forward in the evolution of a socialist program. All Chartist leaders and publications made reference to the economic problems of the workers as they leveled demands and accusations against the landlords and commercial classes. They spoke of rents, the price of food, and wages. Certain segments and leaders within the loosely-associated movement dwelt heavily upon economic problems and proposed economic rather than political means of achieving their goals. For example, the works of Feargus O'Connor might easily convince a historian that the movement was shaped totally by economic forces and that the participants desired only a redistribution

of wealth. O'Connor and his followers called for the enactment of his unique "land plan." He submitted details for consideration to the Chartist Convention in September, 1843. This plan, reflecting his hatred of machinery and the factory system, proposed to remedy the evils of the system by returning the people to the land. Organized on a corporation basis, O'Connor's land scheme called for working men to buy shares in the "Chartist Land Co-Operative Society." These shares could be purchased in weekly installments. The land company planned to buy estates on the open market and divide them into small holdings. Tenant rent was to be very low, five per cent per annum, and all proceeds from the rent were to be reinvested in more land for the company. The scheme gained official sanction by the National Convention in 1845. Due to the comparative prosperity of the period following and the lack of business ability on the part of O'Connor, the program met with little success, although some land was purchased and a few artisans returned to farming.[4]

During the campaign for the Land Company, O'Connor won the admiration and discipleship of Ernest Jones, who had for some time been actively engaged in agitating for democratic and social reforms. Jones became the co-editor of two Chartist papers owned and edited by O'Connor. The Northern Star, which gives the best and most comprehensive account of the happenings and programs of Chartism, was established by O'Connor in 1837. To publicize and encourage participation in his land scheme he began publication of a second paper, The Labourer, in 1847. As pointed out earlier, most of Jones's writings show a clear example of Marxian influence.

Another socialist theory can be found in J. Bronterre O'Brien's

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[4]Hovell, pp. 267-282.

Bronterre's National Reformer, also a Chartist publication. O'Brien did not favor Jones's comprehensive collective schemes but insisted the land should be redistributed by the government.[5] Moreover, the tone of the 1839 Chartist Petition to the House of Commons gave vent to class hostility and pointed especially to fiscal oppressions. The petitioners maintained that England was a land of enterprising merchants and industrious working men which had enjoyed a prolonged period of peace, and yet they still existed in great suffering. Taxes were high, they insisted, and the workhouses were full. The Reform Bill of 1832 promised to remedy this grave situation, but the poor of England had been bitterly deceived. The petition dogmatically declared that the laws which made food dear and money scarce must be abolished. They demanded that taxation be made to fall on property, not on industry.[6] Chartist participation in the Anti-Corn Law agitation showed also that the masses may have been more desirous of cheaper food than of the right to vote. The speeches of O'Connor, Jones, and Stephens were filled with references to revolutions, riots, and demands for economic gains for the working class.

The intensity of the class conflicts and revolutionary desires within Chartism has always divided historians. Their interpretations have a broad range. Some proclaim economics to be the most important of the factors that produced and molded Chartism, others feel that the political demands of Chartism were wholly a product of the economic depressions, while still others present the movement as the beginning of active socialism in England, and the extremists see in Chartism the first example of the "inevitable class struggle" believed to be emerging in every capitalist

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[5]Slosson, p. 42.

[6]Gammage, pp. 96-98.

society.

Karl Marx and Friedrich Engels, contemporaries of the movement, treated it as a laboring class struggle against the capitalist system. Their writings show great sympathy and enthusiasm for Chartism, seeing in it fulfillment of their predictions of class struggle and possible basis for international socialism.[7] Marx in his earliest writings recognized the unique position of England in the mid-nineteenth century. As the starting point and principal locale of industrial capitalism, Britain became the home of the most powerful bourgeoisie and the largest proletariat in the world. British merchants dominated the commercial scene throughout the century.[8] For Marx, England was the "veritable laboratory" where the forces of capitalism were most prevalent. In order to investigate the nature of capitalist methods he turned to their "classical grounds," England,[9] where all agrarian life was made subordinate to capitalist exploitation. He drew a great deal of his material and illustrations for Das Kapital from British history. Here the rural population was uprooted, villages razed, farm buildings destroyed, and the land put to new use. As a result, traditional society was completely "subverted and the conditions of production were so shaped historically as to permit the most favorable investment of capital," while the "great masses of people were suddenly and forcibly torn away from their means of subsistence, and hurled on the labor market as 'free proletarians.'"[10]

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[7]Slosson, p. 27.

[8]Solomon Bloom, The World of Nations: A Study of the National Implications in the Work of Karl Marx (New York, 1941), p. 100.

[9]Das Kapital, I, vi, p. 682, quoted in Bloom, p. 100.

[10]Das Kapital, I, vi, p. 682, quoted in Bloom, p. 102.

The bourgeois-proletariat issue must then be settled first in England, Marx asserted. England must set the pattern, for if she, the most powerful economically, were to become socialist many countries would follow her example, while the remaining ones would be too weak to resist the tide. On the other hand, if England did not embrace socialist doctrine she was strong enough to thwart the new order in any other outpost. Capitalism had to be halted in its original and strongest center.[11]

English labor also received much attention in Marx's writings, for during the 1840's and 1850's, when he formulated his major economic and political ideas, Chartism stood as the most promising popular reform movement in the world. Marx felt the English workers, as a revolutionary class, were destined to lead the victorious cause of the exploited workers everywhere. In 1847 he spoke thus in London on the Polish Question:

> The victory of the English Proletarians over the English bourgeoisie is ... decisive for the victory of all oppressed people over their oppressors .... You Chartists need not express pious hopes for the emancipation of nationalities. Defeat your own internal enemies and you may then have the proud consciousness of having defeated the whole old society.[12]

England's active labor movement would assure that the reforms would accomplish radical social goals, Marx contended. He foresaw that the democratization of the English suffrage would be a "far more socialistic measure than anything which has been honored with that name on the Continent."[13] The failure of England to share in the Revolutions of 1848 disappointed Marx greatly but did not destroy his faith in Chartism. And when the business recovery of 1849-1850 dimmed the prospects of direct

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[11] Bloom, p. 107.

[12] "Samtliche Werke, VI, pp. 359-60, quoted in Bloom, p. 108.

[13] New York Tribune, August 25, 1852, p. 6, quoted in Bloom, p. 108.

proletarian uprising, Marx remained confident that revolution was "just as certain as another decline in the business curve."[14]

Gradually during the 1850's and 1860's the course of events in England forced Marx to moderate his opinion of the revolutionary nature of the Chartist Movement. In 1852 he wrote of "knowledge acquired by some of the popular leaders that the people are too indolent to create, for the moment, a movement of their own .... The mass of the Chartists, too, are at the present moment absorbed by material production." Still, he maintained the decline was temporary and that at "all points, the nucleus of the party is reorganized, and the communications reestablished, in England as well as in Scotland, and in event of a commercial and political crisis, the importance of the present noiseless activity at the headquarters of Chartism will be felt all over Great Britain."[15]

Later major changes appeared in Marx's predictions of a revolutionary future for England. He began to question the possibility of attacking capitalism at its English "heart" and considered the advisability of "violent outbreaks" in "the extremities of the bourgeoisie body," the continental countries, insisting all the while that the "economic foundation" of revolutions was "always laid in England."[16] His Address to the Working Men's International (1864) disclosed his personal estimate of the weakness of Chartist socialism. The Chartists could only criticize the capitalistic mode of production which they could not explain nor gain mastery over. They could only reject it as evil, he continued.[17]

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[14] Ibid., July 27, 1857, p. 5, quoted in Bloom, p. 108.

[15] Ibid., November 25, 1852, p. 6, quoted in Bloom, p. 109.

[16] Ibid., September 6, 1870, p. 7, quoted in Bloom, pp. 108-109.

[17] V. Adoratsky, (ed.), Karl Marx, Selected Works (Moscow, 1935), p. 438.

Only during the short period from 1845 to 1850, were Marx and Engels in personal contact and never for extended periods of time. Yet for the next twenty years they carried on an extensive correspondence, while each read the other's articles before publication. Engels often provided Marx with living funds and obtained data on industrial life for his writings. Both were made available because Engels's father held many manufacturing interests on the continent and in Manchester, England. Little theoretical difference is to be found, therefore, in Marx's and Engels's interpretations of the English situation in mid-nineteenth century and of the history and future of Chartism.

Engels went to England in the 1840's as an agent of his father's spinning mills, and while there associated himself with the popular reform movements, becoming intimately acquainted with the developments in the capitalist industry. He, too, believed Chartism to be the vanguard of the socialist army and remained convinced that a revolutionary clash between the workers and capitalists in England was inevitable. This he made explicit in his study, The Condition of the Working Class in England in 1844.[18] Admitting the political nature of the movement, he maintained it was only natural that the Chartists should first attack the political power of the bourgeoisie. From its beginning to 1843, he observed, Chartism was not sharply separated from the bourgeoisie, and the difference between the bourgeoisie Radicalism and the radicalism of the workers was practically nonexistent. The attempt of the bourgeoisie to use the Chartist organization to work for the repeal of the Corn Laws in 1845, however, and the refusal of the Chartists to be so manipulated, finally purified Chartism of all bourgeoisie elements. At this stage the workers

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[18](London, 1892).

realized that the capitalists desired free competition and free trade only to serve their own interests, and thus rightly began to view them as enemies. This to Engels explained the "difference between Chartist democracy and all previous bourgeoisie democracy": Chartist democracy was social in nature and thus truly a class movement.[19]

Engels claimed that by 1844 there was "no longer a mere politician among the Chartists ... they realize they must either succumb to the power of competition or overcome it."[20] Naturally, he wrote, the working men would propose to alter the law, since they had no respect for the bourgeois law and submitted to it only because they must. The proposed "proletarian law," the People's Charter, demanded a democratic basis for the House of Commons. "In Chartism it is the whole working class which rises against the bourgeoisie, and attacks, first of all the political power, the legislative rampart with which the bourgeoisie has surrounded itself."[21] The Chartists' role was, therefore, to purify English socialism of its bourgeois taints, so that it would be the true intellectual leader of the English masses and would direct English history.[22]

The Chartist Movement, however, never evolved to this position, and in 1881 H. M. Hyndman, an English disciple of Marxian theory, worked to revive a democratic federation of working men in England. Hyndman at that time discussed with Marx the advisibility of attempting to restoration of the Chartist Movement. While the idea held some appeal to him, Marx doubted its feasibility. The federation of working men organized by

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[19]Friedrick Engels, The Condition of the Working Class in England in 1844 (London, 1952), pp. 235-236.

[20]Ibid.

[21]Ibid., p. 228.

[22]Ibid., pp. 236-238.

Hyndman, later known as the Social Democratic Federation, adopted a program of working for political rights, its most radical tenet being the advocacy of the nationalization of land.[23]

Hyndman's study of English socialism, The Historical Basis of Socialism in England,[24] written in London in 1883, applied Marxian theories to an analysis of Chartism. In the Preface, Hyndman acknowledged his "indebtedness to the famous German historical school of political economy headed by Karl Marx and Friedrich Engels." His few footnotes referred almost exclusively to Marx and Engels; he gave no other bibliography.

Hyndman contended that the Chartist Movement grew out of the conditions caused by the Reform Bill of 1832, the depression, and the New Poor Law which closed a safety valve. The Chartist political program was thus a restatement of the old demands of the earlier years in the century; however, the leaders had broader objectives in mind. The demands, founded in the Englishmen's own history, asked for restoration of rights Englishmen had once enjoyed, something the continental revolutions could not do.[25] The National Convention, which convened in London in 1839, Hyndman portrayed as an "imposing democratic parliament, which might, perhaps, have led to some real step in advance, had ... the Chartist leaders [not] ... overestimated their own strength, and passed resolutions at their meetings which only provoked, without frightening the dominant classes."[26] He proceeded to attack the New Poor Law with socialist vigor, saying that the

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[23]Harry Wellington Laidler, A History of Socialist Thought (New York, 1933), p. 232.

[24](London, 1883).

[25]H. M. Hyndman, The Historical Basis of Socialism in England (London, 1883), p. 208.

[26]Ibid., p. 209.

political economists "reasoned from a false principle" and did not take into account the fact that the national wealth had increased more rapidly than had the poor tax. The law was a Whig move to "starve the poor from the land," the measure passed when there was a great accumulation of wealth being "squandered on useless wars" and in "ignorant foreign speculations."[27]

The gulf between the worker and the capitalist widened to dangerous proportions, Hyndman continued. The skilled worker became worse off than the serf of seven centuries earlier, for the latter had been slave to a master, but the former was slave to a whole class. Throughout this period the state raised "laissez-faire" and individual rights of property "to the height of a political and social religion," no thought being given to checking the authority of the factory owners.[28] And these factory owners did not care if children lived or died, if homes were broken and demoralized by an absent and overworked mother, if their fellowmen lived worse than livestock. The capitalists believed the function of the working man and his family in "free England was to provide gain for the capitalist class." These capitalists who acquired their wealth by "greed, good luck and utter unscrupulousness ... had not the slightest mercy upon the people who, by their unpaid labor, provided them with their fortunes."[29] The agitation for the repeal of the Corn Laws proved this. Viciously attacked as a capitalist move to protect their own interest and designed for their sole benefit, the Anti-Corn Law agitation was credited by Hyndman with

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[27]Ibid., pp. 182-183.

[28]Ibid., p. 161.

[29]Ibid., pp. 153-154.

causing the failure of the Chartists to carry out any portion of their political program. Since competition for jobs was so strong among wage-earners, cheaper wheat would only mean the worker could and would work for lower wages, the difference going to the capitalists' pockets rather than to the workers'. Most of the socialist leaders saw through the trick at once, but the middle class program, backed by much money and strong leadership, displaced the masses' loyalty to the Charter. The Anti-Corn Law agitation was thus "a red herring trailed across the path of democracy." Hyndman insisted that the working class should have held aloof from "their most dangerous enemies, the capitalists, and used their organized force to insist upon concessions before they moved at all, they would scarcely have failed to secure some advantage."[30]

Both groupings within Chartism, the "physical force" and the "moral force" factions, could be blamed for lack of Chartist advantage, declared Hyndman, and both were partly right and partly wrong. Since the physical force men lacked the power to carry out their program, they should have preached peace until they did have; and since the peaceable men could never hope to carry out all their program by vote, they should have set to work to organize their force.[31] In conclusion, Hyndman admitted that the great revolutionary wave of 1848 produced little effect upon England and that the workers all over the civilized world were forced to accept a life spent in hovels and workshops. Nonetheless, the Chartists who were imprisoned and punished for their activities, men such as O'Brien and Jones, were the "martyrs of the English Proletariat, and whenever again the workers of our country combine in earnest to free their own class from

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[30]Ibid., pp. 223-227.

[31]Ibid., p. 211.

capitalist thralldom, let them not be unmindful of those who, in less happy days, struggled and suffered to save the poor who should come from oppression and wrong."[32]

V. I. Lenin perpetuated and echoed this revolutionary Marxian interpretation into the Post-Marxian period by his twentieth century comments on the writings of Marx and Engels. Emphatically he stated that England gave the world "the first broad, truly mass and politically clear-cut proletarian revolutionary movement, Chartism," and that the movement "brilliantly anticipated much that the future Marxian was to preach."[33] He felt that the revolutionary image of Chartism had been greatly damaged by the reaction to the revolutionary period of 1848 and 1849. The reactionaries desire always to stamp out all revolutionary traditions, ideas, and slogans, and to represent the revolution as "elemental madness," he explained. For an example of such reactionary techniques Lenin turned to the English Fabian writers Beatrice and Sidney Webb, declaring: "Those obtuse eulogists of English philistinism, the Webbs, try to represent Chartism, the revolutionary period of the English labour movement as pure childishness, as 'sowing wild oats,' as a piece of naïveté unworthy of serious attention."[34]

Actually the Webbs were not usually viewed as reactionaries. They were sometimes considered revisionists due to their active involvement in the English socialist movement through the Fabian Society. The Society, organized in 1884, worked for the gradual spread of socialist ideas and throughout its history attracted the imagination, commitment, and efforts

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[32]Ibid., pp. 211-212.

[33]V. I. Lenin, Marx, Engels, Marxism (Moscow, 1951), p. 457.

[34]Ibid., p. 239.

of many writers. The use of the pen and logic were often their most potent weapons; Sidney Webb (later the Earl of Passfield) and his wife, Beatrice, George D. H. Cole, Bernard Shaw, and R.H. Tawney were among the productive apologists of Fabian ideals.

If the Webbs and the others were reactionaries, they reacted against the mood and mode of the nation's history as it had been written during the nineteenth century. Overwhelmingly Whig in vantage point and interpretation, the history of England written by Englishmen had teemed with individualism, laissez-faire, and national and upper class superiority. The new twentieth-century Fabian-oriented socialists used economic history to cloud the surface tranquillity and healthiness which the upper class had presented to the world through their histories. The scientific socialism of the Marxians failed to win the Fabians' wholehearted support, since ideas were more important to them. They accepted the theory that social and political ideas were largely products of economic forces, but they also felt that ideas usually persist long after the circumstances which brought them forth had disappeared, and sometimes even events conform to ideas. They were, then, a product of English socialism, Utopian and Christian in origin, more than German.[35] Their interest in the Chartist Movement, therefore, centered on the movement's evolutionary socialist qualities, not its possible revolutionary tendencies. They dwelt on its contributions to and connection with the development and growth of trade unions, co-operatives, democratic processes, and socialistic thought.

The major field of research activity for the Webbs included English co-operatives, trade unions, and related capitalist developments. In

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[35]Ausubel, p. 327.

1891, prior to her marriage to Sidney Webb, Beatrice Potter published her first book, The Co-Operative Movement in Great Britain.[36] She found that during the decade between 1834 and 1844 the history of the working class was the history of Chartism. She proclaimed it to be the "heroic period of English labour politics."[37] Speaking of the grim determination and organizing ability among the working men and their leaders, she noted the successful attempt to establish a national federation of all trades, the formation of the working men's associations and Radical Clubs throughout the country, and the adoption of a "well-conceived political programme, the People's Charter." This democratic association and cooperation was made possible only by Chartist influence. It laid the basis for the later development of socialism. Still, within the Chartist organization she saw the best and worst elements of democracy.[38]

Beatrice Webb agreed that economic forces had brought Chartism into being. Seven years of trade depression, the New Corn Laws, and widespread misery prompted the associations. Sidney Webb qualified and refined the causation in his History of Trade Unionism,[39] maintaining that Chartism came into existence because the unrepresented working classes had no adequate outlet for their discontent. With suffrage restricted, their only possible activity was agitation. The movement undertook political action because labor was not sufficiently organized to struggle effectively with capitalists in the economic realm. It is no mere coincidence, he

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[36](London, 1891).

[37]Beatrice Potter Webb, The Co-Operative Movement in Great Britain (London, 1891), p. 55.

[38]Ibid., p. 56.

[39](London, 1926).

assured his readers, that active Chartist years coincided with a period of great weakness for labor unions, since the movement filled the temporary gap left by union inactivity. Many trade unionists took up the political agitation of the Chartists to battle unemployment and depression although the unions never joined the movement as a body.[40] The unions' weakness left no available avenue open to the working men for the voicing of their "helpless rage" against being "handed over without appeal to the capitalist's dictatorship."[41] This was again the central theme in the Webbs' joint effort, The Decay of Capitalist Civilization.[42]

Assessing the lasting effects of Chartism, the Webbs maintained that by the 1840's the movement had degenerated from a demand for political democracy to a scramble for ownership of small plots of land.[43] Furthermore, with its collapse British trade unionism lost all revolutionary tendencies and settled down to the attainment of limited ends of progressive improvements by bargaining between wage-earners and employers.[44]

The contributions of the Chartist Movement to the development of socialist thought, rather than the movement's practical purposes interested George D. H. Cole. In each of his volumes[45] Cole found little socialism in Chartism and no new thought coming from the movement, while

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[40]Sidney Webb, The History of Trade Unionism (London, 1926), pp. 157-158.

[41]Ibid., p. 169.

[42](New York, 1923).

[43]Webb, History of Trade Unionism, p. 178.

[44]Ibid., p. 649.

[45]A Short History of the British Working-Class Movement, 1789-1947 (London, 1925); A History of Socialist Thought, Vol. I: Socialist Thought, The Forerunners, 1789-1850 (London, 1955); Socialism in Evolution (Harmondsworth, 1938).

he repeatedly asserted that it could only fail. The Chartist demands were on the face of the matter, purely political, but in reality they were no more than a revival of the old Radical cause, and the movement in its mass content was entirely economic.[46] However, Cole felt that Chartism became in time more proletarian than Owenite, since it accepted the philosophy of a working class uprising against the rich.[47]

Cole cited many reasons for the absence of socialism in the movement. Constitutional government was well established in Great Britain, which meant there could be no revolutionary alliance between those who wanted constitutionalism and democracy. Moreover, Great Britain was already an advanced capitalist country in which the capitalists were in a strong enough position to insist on management of affairs to suit their interests. Added to this was the scattered position of the British industrial proletariat; London could not serve as a revolutionary center like Paris.[48] And while the Chartists were successful in rallying the strength of the working class behind them, they "were beating their heads against a brick wall," for it was impossible for the working classes alone, at that stage of economic evolution, either to make a successful revolt or to gain parliamentary reforms. Marx has told us, Cole recalled, that no system is "superseded until it has developed its full potentialities and become, instead of a means of advancing the exploitation of the resources of production, a fetter upon their further developments."[49] The new English governing class after 1832 was too conscious of its strength and opportunities

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[46]Cole, Socialism in Evolution, p. 30.

[47]Cole, Socialist Thought, The Forerunners, p. 142.

[48]Ibid., p. 156.

[49]Cole, Socialism in Evolution, pp. 30-31.

to share willingly its new-found power with the class below it.

The absence of intellectual activity on the part of the Chartist leadership and their failure to present new challenges and philosophies in the way of socialist doctrines relegated the movement to a lesser position than it should have held, wrote Cole. Chartism only echoed Owen, Louis Blanc, and Marx, and even then for the most part the workers did, not listen to the ideas. The ideas that did dominate Chartism were diverse, disorganized, and lacking in intellectual and philosophical construction, Cole insisted.[50]

Most scholars of British socialism would wholeheartedly agree with Cole that Chartism was not dominated and molded by challenging ideas. But most found cause to praise Chartism for its efforts and noted some measure of successful accomplishment in its history. Max Beer, a twentieth-century continental socialist of Austrian birth, claimed that from Chartism's experimental and practical character it followed that there could be no uniformity of opinion as to the ultimate shape of the social revolution and social reconstruction.[51] In reality, he asserted, the period bequeathed a rich heritage of ideas, reforms, and proletarian achievements. "The years of the social-democratic pioneer labours were a period of intensive preliminary reform activity--a time of rejuvenation of England, of the first steps towards the democratization of the British Empire," he wrote.[52] Listing the accomplishments of the period, he recorded the first factory law for children (1833), the first mining law

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[50]Ibid., p. 157.

[51]Max Beer, A History of British Socialism (London, 1919), pp. 281-282.

[52]Ibid., p. 181.

for children and women (1842), the liberation of the press (1836), the ten hour day (1847), the amelioration of the criminal law (1837), the abolition of the Corn Laws (1846), and the repeal of the law prohibiting political associations (1846).[53]

After living and studying in England for twenty years and teaching for some years in France, Beer decided that the "English intellect, from its sheer recklessness, is essentially revolutionary, probably more so than French intellect."[54] Further, he accused English statesmen and educators of endeavoring since 1688 to create a nation with a "conservative, cautiously moving temper, a distrust of generalization, an aversion from carrying the theory to its logical conclusions."[55] And with the beginning of the twentieth century, a new England had been "rousing herself like a strong man after sleep and shaking her invisible locks." English intellects are bold and active as in the past, while "a new Chartist movement has arisen and is daily growing."[56] Thus the nation needed knowledge of its past labors for socialism and social reform, Beer wrote in 1915, in order to cope with the social difficulties which were coming to a head.[57]

It must be understood, Beer declared, that Chartism was much more than a struggle for equal rights; it was a class war aiming at the overthrow of capitalist society and at putting production, distribution, and exchange on a co-operative basis.[58] The revolutionary struggle was

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[53]Ibid.

[54]Ibid., Preface.

[55]Ibid.

[56]Ibid.

[57]Ibid.

[58]Ibid., p. 288.

weakened by lack of unity and by adherence to the historical conception of natural law. From the beginning, the law of nature was widely accepted as the foundation-stone of the movement. All the great manifestoes of the Chartists, eg., the Declaration of Rights of 1831 and 1839, the three petitions of the Chartists of 1839, 1842, and 1848, grounded their democratic demands in the law of nature. Leading spirits of Chartism claimed the law of nature as the source of their knowledge and action. "With the exception of the germinating idea of evolution in history in the year 1834, Chartism lacked the faintest trace of any insight into the growth and decay of right and law, or the dependence of legislators upon social forces and changes."[59] According to natural law, men who made a social contract enjoyed sovereign power and promulgated the laws. Subsequently a single individual or small minority usurped this sovereign power and ruled only for their own benefit. In addition, whoever possesses force holds sovereign power and can make laws at will. The powerful state can then change public property into private, or private property into public, or mold society any way it desires. This means, so the Chartists reasoned, that the revolutionaries and reformers must gain power. The main task of their movement lay in the seizing of the power of the State, to destroy the oligarchy and approximate the laws of nature.[60]

The active Chartist period, wrote Beer, bequeathed to the working class the co-operative idea, more successful trade unions, and an international outlook. It introduced the workers as a struggling and advancing

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[59] Ibid., p. 291.

[60] Ibid.

class into literature and political economy.[61] Chartism stimulated the development of the intellectual system of Marx and Engels, while it strongly influenced Disraeli, Kingsley, and Carlyle. Moreover, the labor struggles and sufferings were never in vain: they prepared the way for eventual victory.[62]

The early Fabians, Marxians, and Utopian Socialists were not the last to describe Chartism as a movement designed mainly by economic factors. Their research and writings made such an impact that most scholars now feel the need to give some merit to their contentions, and usually the economic view is one of the greatest considerations. Many general histories, social histories, and text-book accounts declare that Chartism was above all else a movement toward socialism, in which laborers of the mid-nineteenth century determined to better their economic situation.

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[61]Max Beer, The General History of Socialism and Social Struggles (New York, 1957), p. 181.

[62]Ibid., pp. 181-183.

CHAPTER IV

CHARTISM: A STUDY IN SOCIAL DISCONTENT AND POLITICAL AGITATION

The period of the Chartists has from its beginning received the special attention of the social and political historians. All considerations of the "reform era" of English history normally include an extensive discussion of the Chartist Movement. In the twentieth century, however, only two narrative histories of that movement have been published in the English-speaking world. A History of the Chartist Movement by Julian West, a promising young historian who died prematurely as a result of his war experience, was published in 1921. The notes and manuscripts on the subject by Mark Hovell, British scholar, were edited and published by his friends and colleagues in 1925, nine years after his death in World War I.

Asa Briggs and Barbara and J. L. Hammond have established the most noted reputations as social historians of the reform period of their nation's history. The outstanding political histories include the works of E. L. Woodward and Elie Halévy. Professor E. L. Woodward was chosen to write the volume covering the period from 1815 to 1870 for the Oxford History of England series. The multivolume study by Elie Halévy of A History of the English Speaking People in the Nineteenth Century surveyed the period in detail. Added to both the social and political information about Chartist history are the dissertations of three students at Columbia University which were published in 1916.

In the early years of the twentieth century when democracy became

the great dream of the western world, these two exceptional young British historians, Hovell and West, decided almost simultaneously that a complete history of the Chartist Movement, one of the first agitations for democratic reforms, should be written. Except for Gammage's study, no narrative history of the movement existed. Both efforts added much to the general knowledge of the subject.

Julian West began his research and writing because he felt that Chartism, as the first instance of working class agitation on a national scale, occupied an exceptionally important position in the social history of England. He was disturbed over the historians' portrayal of the movement, contending that they did not do justice to the Chartists, but only copied one another's inaccuracies. "A few facts, a few conventional comments, and a piously expressed gratitude that the English were not as other people in 1848, generally completed the tale of references to Chartism" in the standard histories, he wrote.[1] Hovell desired to investigate and interpret the social and economic causes and results of the movement.

West, however, intended a history of Chartism accentuating the important and exceptional ideas of the movement. In his Preface he explained the reason for emphasizing ideas in his treatise. All effective checks on the abuses of capitalist competition were English in origin, he asserted, including trade unions, co-operatives, and factory acts. Furthermore, the basic revolutionary reaction against capitalism was English in inspiration. The whole Chartist period was marked by a quest for ideas. Within a few years, the working men had had forced upon their attention the pros and cons of trade unionism, industrial unionism,

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[1]West, p. 5.

syndicalism, communism, socialism, co-operative ownership of land, land nationalization, co-operative distribution, co-operative ownership of credit, franchise reform, woman suffrage, factory legislation, poor law reform, municipal reform, free trade, freedom of the press, freedom of thought, the nationalist idea, industrial insurance, building societies, and many other ideas. The People's Charter attempted to combine all schools of reform for joint action, West wrote, but it resulted in disseminating an increasing store of ideas to ever larger audiences.[2]

To West, the most striking characteristic of the Chartist Movement was its "teeming mass of ideas," not any political or social program. He contended that ideas matter more to the working men who listened to William Lovett and Feargus O'Connor than they did to any succeeding generation. Lovett's autobiography was used by West as an illustration of this fact.[3] Touching an entirely different phase of the movement, later studied in greater depth by Harold Faulkner, West endeavored to analyze in general terms the reaction of the churches to Chartism. From his research he determined that the Chartist Movement was regarded as anti-religious by the orthodox Tories. This one fact was responsible for much of the bitter opposition by the middle and upper classes. He found that many of the Chartist leaders were atheistic or Unitarian, and in orthodox minds atheism had been the major cause of the French Revolution.[4]

In his final assessment of the movement West found it in no way, except perhaps superficially, a failure. He felt there was only one

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[2]Ibid., pp. 5-6.

[3]Ibid., p. 6.

[4]Ibid., p. 63.

essential object of the agitation, "the awakening of class-consciousness," to aid in better organization of the working class in the struggle for greater economic and political power. Thus he wrote:

> Judged by its crop of statutes and statues, Chartism was a failure. Judged by its essential and generally overlooked purpose, Chartism was a success. It achieved, not the Six Points, but a state of mind. This last achievement made possible the renascent trade union movement of the 'fifties, the gradually improving organization of the working classes, the Labour Party, the co-operative movement, and whatever greater triumphs labour will enjoy in the future.[5]

This assessment, of course, voiced West's obsession with the ideas and ideals of the movement, not its practical objectives and successes.

Hovell's writing was affected most by his study at Professor Karl Lamprecht's Institut für Kultur-und Universalgeschichte at Leipzig, where he held an assistantship in 1912-1913. Lamprecht's concept of history, which made a lasting impression on the young English scholar, held that the social and economic developments are infinitely more important than the political history to which most historians have limited themselves. Not the state alone, he taught, but society as a whole is the real object of the historians' study. This became, with few modifications, Hovell's personal concept of history.[6]

Applying Lamprecht's theory, Hovell showed Chartism to be a movement whose immediate plan was political reform and whose ultimate purpose was social regeneration.[7] For while the program and policies of Chartism were purely political, Hovell asserted, the intent was social and economic regeneration of society, the radical program being recognized as a

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[5]Ibid., pp. 294-295.

[6]Hovell, Introduction.

[7]Ibid., p. 1.

means to an end, not the end itself.[8] For the most part, he assessed the movement as a revolt of the working classes against intolerable conditions which had recently come into their lives. Thus, explained Hovell, "the program of social amelioration remained vague and negative;" for its social aims were never defined.[9] On the other hand, the political aims were decisive, developing as they did from a background of radical political tradition.[10] The Chartist type was not unique to the nineteenth century, Hovell wrote; there was rather a "prophetic succession of Radicals between 1791, when the first Working Men's Radical Society--The London Corresponding Society--was founded, and 1838, when the Charter was published."[11] Yet he felt that Chartism marked a real departure from English social and political history, representing the first movement of modern times engineered and controlled by working men.[12]

The program of the movement, Hovell readily admitted, was totally political, "scarcely connected with any specific projects of social or other reforms, or with any particular social theory."[13] The Chartists agreed on a negative policy of protest against restrictions which they blamed as the source of their misery, but their positive policy narrowed down to a sensible and limited political program which, even if realized, left the roots of social evils hardly touched. This was unavoidable, asserted Hovell, since Chartists were in profound disagreement as to the

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[8]Ibid., p. 7.

[9]Ibid., p. 1.

[10]Ibid., p. 3.

[11]Ibid., p. 6.

[12]Ibid., p. 311.

[13]Ibid., p. 7.

use to be made by the proletariat of the political power which they claimed.[14]

While accepting the existence of disagreements within the movement, Hovell rejected the traditional division of the movement into various schools. He declared that the attempts to divide Chartism into partisans of moral and of physical force were superficial. He contended that the dispute between O'Connor and the moral-force men originated in a mere difference as to method, never touching the fundamental problem of the Chartist ideal. Hovell maintained, "The differences of general ideal and social status, the contrasts in method, faith, and conduct help explain the feuds within the Chartist organization."[15] Further, the inexperience of the leaders in the give-and-take of political affairs, their dislike of compromise, and the insistence of each man that his particular doctrine of reform was best accounted for their lack of organized action. Since the law had denied them participation in politics, the working class leaders had no opportunity to acquire the skill of transacting business with one another, Hovell pointed out, and their little education led to class jealousy and intolerance.[16]

This inexperience, intolerance, and passion of the Chartists put them at a great disadvantage when they clashed with the middle class over free trade or the Charter, asserted Hovell. He insisted that the Chartists were "hopelessly outargued by Cobden, Bright, W. F. Fox, and the rest," for "both in theory and method the League was superior."[17] Refuting

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[14]Ibid., p. 304.

[15]Ibid., p. 305.

[16]Ibid., p. 309.

[17]Ibid., pp. 216-218.

Gammage's and other Chartists' contentions that the Chartists proved too much for the Anti-Corn Law Leaguers, Hovell insisted that when they debated, the Chartists brought themselves "into bad ordour" and often had to "beat a ridiculous retreat." Unfortunately, said Hovell, the Northern Star encouraged the practice by claiming victories over the League, or "the Plague," as they referred to it.[18]

As for the working class agitation against the Poor Law, Hovell found it to be divided into two parts: an organized attempt to prevent the introduction of the new law, and a popular movement to protest against the law itself. The Poor-Law agitation had, also, a totally different character from the agitation began under the direction of the London Working Men's Association and the Birmingham Political Union. It was more violent, more emotional, and held a sense of greater urgency. When the movement was absorbed into Chartism the difference made a resounding influence upon the fate of the latter. In fact, Hovell suggested that fully-developed Chartism derived its "program from London [Working Men's Association] ... its organization from Birmingham [Political Union] ... its personnel and vehemence from Lancashire and Yorkshire [trade unions and Poor Law agitators]."[19]

As a historian interested in social and economic developments, Hovell attempted to assess Chartism according to this broad view. He held that the general judgment of both contemporaries and later historians relegated Chartism to a place among the lost causes of history. Hovell assured his readers that, while the Chartist organization failed and the individual Chartists were very conscious of their wrecked hopes, a wider

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[18]Ibid., pp. 218-219.

[19]Ibid., p. 98.

survey suggested that in a long run Chartism was by no means a failure. The Chartist platform of political reform, though denounced as revolutionary at the time, was afterwards substantially adopted by the British state. This political success can be overstressed, warned Hovell, for "not a single article of the Chartist policy had the remotest chance of becoming law until the movement expired."[20] Only when Chartism ceased to be a name of terror and the process of giving effect to its program was taken up by the middle-class Parliament of the later Victorian Age, did it gain any measure of success. After 1867 the extended franchise rendered Parliament more and more susceptible to working class pressure. The social ideas of Chartism had still a lesser chance of success through direct and immediate Chartist action than its political program. The Chartists were never able to adhere to a united program to achieve a definite social ideal, Hovell maintained, and the "true failure of Chartism lay in its inability to perform this task."[21]

Even the failures of the Chartists had their educational value, Hovell concluded. Its modest success taught elementary lessons of self-discipline and self-government that made the gradual development of British democracy possible without endangering national stability. And eventually even its social program became a part of the British popular opinion. The movement helped "to break down the iron walls of class separation, and showed that the terrible working man was not very different from the governing classes when the time came for him to exercise direct power."[22]

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[20]Ibid., pp. 300-301.

[21]Ibid., pp. 301-303.

[22]Ibid., p. 311.

True, the workingman was probably very little different from the governing class by the time he won the vote, because the Chartists and their movement not only effected a change in English society but were also changed by that society. This may explain why the study of the Chartist Movement has intrigued many social historians and economists. Barbara and J. L. Hammond have done extensive research and writing in the general area of the effect which the changes of the Industrial Revolution had on English lives. Their several minute studies of the specific groups affected by the introduction of the factory system in England have normally ended with 1832. When in 1930, however, they published their social history of England covering the chronological period between the passage of the Reform Bill of 1832 and the outbreak of the Crimean War, they entitled it The Age of the Chartists, explaining that the movement best exemplified the discontent and desire for action which permeated the second half of the nineteenth century.[23] The book, they said, was an attempt "to describe the society that was brought to life by the great changes of the time; the spirit of that society; the first efforts to regulate its life; and the discontent that distinguished this phase of English history,"[24] and not an attempt to write a history of the movement.

Likewise the works of Asa Briggs, Professor at the University of Leeds, were not intended to be a full history of Chartism. In 1959 Dr. Briggs published a volume covering the period from 1784 to 1867 as part of a new series on the history of England. During the same year, he edited a collection of studies of the Chartist Movement by leading English

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[23] J. L. Hammond and Barbara Hammond, The Age of the Chartists, 1832-1854: A Study of Discontent (Hampden, Connecticut, 1930), p. vii.

[24] Ibid.

scholars. In the latter he gave the better indications of his personal interpretations of Chartism. His introductory chapter of the Chartist Studies stated his belief that a good study of Chartism should begin with an appreciation of regional and local diversity. A thorough understanding of the birth of Chartism and its fluctuating career between the publication of the Charter and the withering away of the agitation in the 1850's would be impossible without examining the movement of the relevant economic indices. Some of these elements of diversity are measurable, Dr. Briggs maintained, although adequate statistics do not always exist on rents, wages, prices, and unemployment to permit a complete study. Economic diversities, however, do not suffice in explaining the program and strength of Chartism.[25]

Dr. Briggs found that clear definition of the movement required investigation of variations in local class structure, in the content of local grievances, the traditions of political leadership, and mass agitation, and the adaptability and persistence of the Chartists and their opponents. He said:

> Chartism was a snowball movement which gathered together local grievances and sought to give them common expression in a nationwide agitation. Many of the internal conflicts which divided it had their origins in the differences of background and outlook in what the Chartists called 'the localities.'[26]

These differences cannot be attributed, declared Briggs, to the differences in Chartist personalities, however significant the influence of personality might have been. "Local differences need to be related to economic and social structure--to the composition of the labour force, the condition

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[25]Asa Briggs (ed.), Chartist Studies (New York, 1959), p. 2.

[26]Ibid., pp. 2-3.

of work, including the relations between 'masters' and 'men', and the timing and extent of local unemployment." for an adequate exploration of local grievances.[27] Briggs and his collaborates in the publication of the local facts and views of Chartism hoped for a new narrative history of the movement in which the local histories and statistics would be treated.

Dr. Briggs's general survey of Chartism in the history of the 1784-1867 period disclosed further interpretations. According to his view the Chartist claim that the working class could defeat the Whigs and Tories was quite impracticable, and the movement was doomed to failure even before their Charter was drafted. Too much of their energy was devoted to the discussion not of ends but of means, and even if they had agreed about the means they could never have gained enough support to change the character of Parliament.[28] Perhaps, Briggs concluded, the most important point that Chartism demonstrated was not the weakness of the English working classes in the society of the 1840's but the strength of the middle classes.[29]

Assured that no simple explanation for the Chartist Movement could be given, the Hammonds defined it as "the resentment of men convinced that there was something false and degrading in the arrangement of justice in their world."[30] Chartism, they suggested, was born of change in the customs and conditions of society. There have been many ages in the history of the world when social injustices were great and there was

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[27]Ibid., p. 3.

[28]Asa Briggs, The Age of Improvement (New York, 1959), p. 305.

[29]Ibid., p. 312.

[30]Hammonds, pp. 1-2.

neither revolt nor agitation, but this could be explained by the fact that "customs will reconcile men and women to conditions that they would find intolerable if they came fresh to them .... For custom has a magic that takes the sting out of injustice making it seem rather a decree of heaven than the sin of man."[31] The authors maintained that this spell cast by custom has always been one of the greatest conservative forces in the world. However, when society passes through changes that destroy the life of custom, statesmen are given the difficult task of handling the questions that have been sleeping in men's minds beneath the surface of habit. The Industrial Revolution produced such changes in England and the resulting social conditions and changes gave birth to discontent that in turn produced Chartism, wrote the Hammonds.[32]

The Charter was the rallying point for a number of different discontents, stated the Hammonds. In fact it embraced not merely divergent but mutually hostile schools of reform. The Hammonds pointed out that the name Chartist was given to a

> London artisan who shared Lovett's enthusiasm for education and a cheap press: to the Birmingham politician who supported Attwood's campaign for a reform of the currency: to the handloom weaver or the minor who flocked to the meetings where Oastler denounced the Poor Law, or Feargus O'Connor was spinning one project after another from his active and ill-regulated brain: to the South Wales miner who followed Frost with a pike to Newport and to prison.[33]

The leaders of the working classes were divided and, according to the Hammonds, actually hated each other. And yet within the Chartist Movement they all had their devoted disciples.[34]

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[31]Ibid., p. 16.

[32]Ibid., pp. 16-17.

[33]Ibid., p. 268.

[34]Ibid., p. 310.

While every phase of Chartist agitation was a protest of the working class against the place they occupied in the new industrial society, the campaigns reflected the different experiences of various populations. Agreeing with Professor Briggs's thesis, the Hammonds stressed the fact that Chartists were not all "smarting under the same grievance."[35] Rejecting the contention that Chartism was a precise and logical demand for political reform, or any particular reform, they explained it as a "protest as incoherent as the life that provoked it."[36] The movement could not be dissected and analyzed in its individual parts, they maintained, but must be understood in its more complex and perplexing whole. They attempted to reveal the essence of the movement by saying:

> To regard Chartism as an episode, as an effort that failed, a flash in the pan, something to which you can give date of birth and death, is to misread the history of the time. The chief feature of that history is the growth and prevalence of discontent. No doubt that discontent was due to different causes: the discomforts of the change from the life of the peasant or the artisan to that of factory worker: the pressure from time to time of mass unemployment unrelieved by any remedy: the special hardships of the new Poor Law ... The discontent ... was provoked by an inequality that condemned the mass of education ... how conscious they were of the want of sympathy and colour in their surroundings; of the sharp division that was drawn between those who could enjoy life and those who had to bear its burdens.[37]

When organized Chartism flickered out, its force was still felt, the Hammonds insisted. It went into different movements such as those for education, public health, trade unions, temperance, and the later movements for the franchise.[38] Further, they credited Chartism as the impetus

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[35]Ibid., p. 272.

[36]Ibid., p. 274.

[37]Ibid., pp. 274-275.

[38]Ibid., p. 276.

for the slow and gradual improvement of the bleak life of the working class. For though the workmen had no votes for Parliament and rarely had votes for town council or Boards of Guardians, they took active part in management of trade unions, co-operative societies, temperance societies, and friendly societies. This meant that working men were making decisions, assuming responsibilities, meeting and considering other points of view, and expressing and developing their own ideas.[39] Thus, concluded the Hammonds, the Chartist Movement rightly deserved the phrase John Stuart Mill applied to it, "the victory of the vanquished."[40]

For a more detailed and comprehensive chronological account of the Chartist Movement one must consult the major histories of the period, such as the works of Elie Halévy or E. L. Woodward. True, these surveys usually were written with politics as a central theme, but the better ones strive to include the factors of causation as well as the bare facts. E. L. Woodward, who was assigned the 1815-1870 period of the Oxford History of England, attempted to present a broad survey of both the political happenings and the social climate of the period. He made a clear distinction between the political and social, however, and handled Chartism in the political section of the study. Nevertheless, he seemed to be more interested in the movement's efforts to improve social conditions than the efforts to obtain political rights.

Professor Woodward regarded the movement as political agitation coming directly from the working class, which developed mainly outside Parliament, and in opposition to the social and economic system of which Parliament was guardian. Chartism broke with all established parties, he contended,

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[39] Ibid., pp. 335-340.

[40] Ibid., p. 276.

although the Radicals struggled to remain in touch with the politics of the poor. The Tories were actually nearer to the working class by temperament than were the Radicals: nearer in their dislike of change, their suspicion of progress, and their unsystematic, unintellectual support of familiar standards and habits of life. Yet, the working class and Toryism could not be correlated, for the Tories, like the Radicals, wanted to lead all movements. The working men were now insistent upon choosing their own leaders, for experience had taught them to be suspicious of leadership from above.[41]

Woodward treated Chartism with respect and commended the active reform spirit of the times; but he did not, as some have, find great ideas, efficient organization, or able leaders within the movement. Instead he suggests that the uneducated working classes, being at the mercy of words, gave their confidence too easily. The leadership of popular movements fell to "outcasts and adventurers from other parties and classes, to jealous or unsuccessful men with a grudge against the existing order."[42] Woodward lamented the fact, declaring the Chartism deserved better leaders, yet he found them all wanting. Lovett was "sensitive and embittered," definitely not a leader of men; John Fielden was a benevolent despot; Joseph Stephens was "absurdly violent ... [and] ... preached fire and civil war;" James O'Brien was an example of a spoiled child, warped by a sense of social inferiority; and Feargus O'Connor, who had all the qualities of a successful demagogue, was the ruin of the Chartist Movement.[43] The author summed up their inabilities and

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[41]Woodward, p. 120.

[42]Ibid., p. 276.

[43]Ibid., pp. 127-130.

weaknesses by stating that they had neither the leisure nor the education to develop a political technique and background of theory. Their political philosophy, if such existed, according to Woodward, came from reading the Bible, from an enthusiasm to right present injustices, and from the conviction that change and progress were harmful.[44] Divided by personal rivalries and disagreements, the program of the Chartists was fluid enough to be bent to each of the leaders' special desires.

The agitation compelled other classes to think about the existing conditions, Woodward asserted. The Chartists' demands came to a society that had already begun seriously to consider the problems, and they sharpened the conscience of society. He felt that the attitude of the governing class towards the movement was itself the sign of a new age. To support this contention, he pointed out that only during the alarm of the revolutionary period of 1848 were there any exceptional legislative measures against freedom of speech; and, while most of the Chartist leaders were arrested, their sentences were never vindictive, nor were any Chartist newspapers suppressed, nor Chartist pamphlets and books confiscated. England was saved from revolution during the 1840's and 1850's due to the action of all classes. The governing classes used wisely their power of suppression, while Chartism and other working class agitation provided a safety valve, a hope for redress of grievances and betterment of conditions.[45]

Trained as a philosopher, Elie Halévy began his career investigating and interpreting the history of socialism and radicalism. Later he chose to devote his attention to modern English history because he saw in England

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[44]Ibid., p. 141.

[45]Ibid.

the best laboratory for the study of the historical problems that interested him most: "the problem of the relationship of ideas and beliefs to material circumstances in social motivation and hence in historical causation."[46] These considerations are central to his interpretation of nineteenty-century English history.

With evidences of extensive research, Halevy carefully presented the complicated facts, contrasting opinions, and events of the period. He never facilitated his analysis by the usual device of slicing up historical material into topical sections. Writing from a central political perspective but pulling in the strands of religious, economic, and intellectual developments, Halevy created a complete panorama of events and ideas.

The only American scholars to produce studies specifically on the Chartist Movement have been three doctoral candidates at Columbia University. Each dealt with a particular phase. Preston Slosson's volume studied the problem of decline, as he proceeded to understand why a movement so well supported by the working classes was abandoned without attaining its program of reforms.[47] Chartism and its relation to the Christian churches was the subject of Harold Faulkner's study. He tested the two prevailing theories concerning the Christian Church and reform: first, the radicals' contention that organized Christianity as represented in the churches has ordinarily been opposed to progress, especially scientific and political; and, second, the modern churchmen's conception of Christ as the great reformer advancing a radical platform. Claiming

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[46]Charles C. Gillispie, "The Work of Elie Halévy: A Critical Appreciation," Journal of Modern History, XXII (September, 1950), p. 232.

[47]Slosson, p. 5.

no intention of resolving the conflict, Faulkner merely selected one movement for democracy and examined the attitude of the various churches toward it, he chose Chartism. Frank Rosenblatt originally planned to write an extensive study of the whole period of the Chartist movement. The First World War frustrated his plan by rendering it impossible for him to visit England to gather material, however. His volume, therefore, ended with the Chartist riots of 1839 and with an unfulfilled promise to publish a second volume covering the later period.

The political nature of Chartism received Professor Slooson's closest scrutiny. He defined the Chartist movement as only one phase of a larger struggle to establish political democracy in Great Britain. To him the Chartists were not only a separate political group but a separate political party, a party often ignored because it did not have representation in Parliament, but still a party. Chartism came into being, commented Slosson, because the working classes had lost confidence in the Radicals, who had represented them politically.[48] The causes for decline were more complicated and numerous, including internal weakness of the party, lack of direct representation in Parliament, ineffective leadership, lack of definite economic policy, increased conservatism of reformers, the harmful influence of O'Connor, remedial legislation, the Anti-Corn Law League activities, and a return of prosperity. Professor Slosson refused to ascribe the decline of Chartism to governmental repression or the failure of the 1848 petition. Even though the Chartist Movement faded and a generation of working men and women were forced to resign themselves to upper class rule and postponement of the complete emancipation of their class, the agitation was not waged in vain, declared Dr. Slosson. The Chartists left the mind of England

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[48] Ibid., pp. 17-20.

changed, which was perhaps the greatest of all revolutions.[49]

As indicated by his title, Professor Rosenblatt was more interested in the social and economic aspects of the movement than in the political. He regarded it as a labor movement, the first compact form of class struggle.[50] Understanding Chartism necessitated a study of the economic state of the period, he maintained, for "whatever we may think of the Materialistic Conception of History as a general philosophy, there can hardly be any doubt that in all struggle of labour, the bread and fork question is the very seed of historical causation."[51] It was this expression of class consciousness that distinguished Chartism both from Utopian Socialism and from previous democratic movements in England. As Chartism crystallized it became more and more a distinct labor struggle for the reconstruction of society. In Rosenblatt's words, "the forms of the demands were purely political, but the object was strictly economic."[52]

Faulkner's unique treatise discussed a phase of Chartism seldom mentioned in any other consideration of the subject, the importance of the Church to the movement and the impact of the movement and its ideas and actions on the Church. The Chartists made definite statements in regard to their desires to see the Church reformed. The Chartist Convention in 1851 announced their policy to include: separation of church and state, state ownership of churches purchased with government funds, abolition of tithes, secularization of education, non-interference by state with church policies. With such frank and antagonistic statements some reaction from

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[49]Ibid., pp. 209-210.

[50]Rosenblatt, p. 9.

[51]Ibid., p. 17.

[52]Ibid., p. 21.

the churches would be expected. From sermons, letters, minutes, and memoirs Professor Faulkner assessed the various churches' reactions. The clergymen of the Established Church, he found, stood almost as one man, opposed to extension of the suffrage and expressed in their sermons distaste for the Chartists and Chartist policies. Examples of these sermons cited were: "The Powers that Be are Ordained of God," "Fear God and Honor the King," and "Obedience to Lawful authority."[53] The Oxford Movement, where reverence for authority was fundamental and political leanings ultra-Tory, had no sympathy or aid for the Chartists, and even the Low Church was hostile.[54]

Although one would expect the Wesleyan Methodists, the Church of the poor class, to condone the agitation, Professor Slosson maintained that it too was officially opposed to democratic innovations of the Chartists.[55] The Methodist society was a closely-knit organization more like the Episcopal and Catholic systems than those of the non-conformists. The power was almost exclusively in the hands of the ministers, and until his death remained exclusively in the hands of Wesley himself. As a strict Tory, Wesley demanded status quo in government and non-interference in political affairs by the clergy.[56] According to Faulkner, the Methodists never officially favored democracy. On the other hand, the non-conformist churches, both pastors and people, took a much more tolerant attitude toward further extension of the franchise. Since the church did not offer leadership to the cause, the working men were forced to lead the fight for

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[53]Harold Underwood Faulkner, Chartism and the Churches: A Study in Democracy (New York, 1916), p. 59.

[54]Ibid., p. 70.

[55]Ibid., p. 81.

[56]Ibid., pp. 80-84.

social reformation, which according to Faulkner tended to strengthen Chartism.

The social and political historians have, therefore, by their extensive research into the causation and background of Chartism, produced works that aid greatly in understanding the character and intent of the agitation, the Chartists, and their world. The broad view of the social historians has best pulled together all the various historiographical schools and produced the most complete, although general, interpretation.

CHAPTER V

CONCLUSION: CHARTISM IN HISTORY

This limited survey of the studies and histories of the Chartist Movement has made possible several general conclusions. The first, and most evident, is the simple fact that there are varying interpretations of the movement. Some have viewed it as a social phenomenon while others have declared it a pure demand for democracy, or for socialism, or for a new political party, or have called it rabble-rousing by an unsavory group of rebels, or an instrument for compounding and dispensing challenging new ideas and philosophies.

Secondly, the variance in the interpretations seems to be produced by two major factors: the author--his background, interests, and purpose; and the time of writing. It is usually assumed that an author's personal history and beliefs are not totally submerged when he takes pen in hand to record and comment upon history. A conscientious and honest historian makes a continual and painstaking effort to present as true an image as is possible. At the same time, however, he does not wish to depersonalize the record to such an extent that it becomes sterile, even if it were possible to do so. Many historians approach a subject with a predetermined, and often even preannounced, goal. This means they may of necessity disregard important information if it is not pertinent to their aim in order to give minute and scholarly attention to their one theme. Writers who desire to investigate the economic causes and consequences of Chartism are not, by their omissions, saying that there were no political and social causes and consequences; they are only limiting their theses to provide a

study in depth of one facet.

Since historians are products of society as well as students of it, their writings reflect the thoughts and spirit of their age. Normally contemporaries of an event have greater difficulty in maintaining an objective approach to it, but at the same time may have a better knowledge of the happenings. This was true of the Chartist Movement, and the one dominating element in contemporary treatments of it was partisanship. All the contemporaries who wrote or spoke about the movement were conditioned by their class and party ties. When events became a part of partisan politics, it was difficult for even intelligent and educated men to remain objective. If the Times, Disraeli, or Carlyle could use the movement to cast discredit on the Whig Ministry, they would; perhaps they would even exaggerate some points and ignore others. And Lord John Russell and The Edinburgh Review may have found it to their party's favor to present the Chartists as revolutionaries and disloyal subjects, even though they might have known that most Chartists did not want to execute the monarch and establish a government of the proletariat. Moreover, the Chartists, especially O'Connor, may have expressed a greater sense of urgency and more revolutionary doctrine than the Charter made necessary or than the majority of the Chartists supported; still, he spoke for the movement.

In the generation prior to the First World War, when men became confident that material and scientific matters were the true realities of life, many historians decided that Chartism, and indeed all history, was determined by economic factors. When the machines reduced society to a state less than Utopian, however, there emerged from this new school of historians a group of intellectuals, "twentieth-century liberals," demanding an end to the practice of laissez-faire by the government. They declared that society as a whole, and the state as the guardian of society,

had to accept responsibility for its members. They were, of course, interested in the history of the machine society that allowed man to subject man to intolerable conditions. These English Fabians and other Socialists quickly branded Chartism as an honest effort of the subjected to fight such a fate. Their reasoning and sympathy was expressed in most of the liberal history of the early years of the new century. The twentieth century also brought forth a wave of nationalism and democracy, which it became the order of the day to praise. Chartism was both national and democratic, thus it was heaped with new laurels.

The most recent writings are marked by more intense and diverse research and by a desire to present the total sweep of the movement. To some degree they reflect twentieth-century ideals and patterns of thought: rejection of laissez-faire, belief in the need for countervailing power units within political and economic realms, rejection of class superiority, approval of welfare state policies, and acceptance of peaceful agitation for worthy ends.

The third point that becomes evident is that all the interpretations deserve some degree of credibility. Although the interpretations cover a wide range--including views of Chartists as socialists, atheists, free traders, protectionists, communists, politicians, philosophers, revolutionists--they all have a basis in the contemporary documents, letters, speeches, reports, and memoirs. Each interpretation can be supported by valid primary sources. The Chartist Movement had only one statement of policy, the Charter. During its history, therefore, Chartism became whatever the leading local agitators, with their speeches and newspapers, made of it. As the Hammonds said, it engulfed a wide variety of people and causes: the London artisan who desired educational reforms, the Birmingham politician who wanted currency reform, the miner who hated the Poor

Law, and the Northerner who was ready to fight to relieve his condition. When Marx and Engels interpreted Chartism as a class struggle, they had little difficulty in supporting their contentions with statements of well-known Chartists. Then, when West presented Chartism as a vehicle and originator of new ideas and philosophies, he also quoted creditable sources. The differences in the later interpretations were never greater than those which existed in the local chronicles of Chartism itself. The heterogeneous grouping under one vague and all-inclusive banner should be comprehensible to modern Americans, who have accepted the same theory in their own political parties.

Fourthly, it becomes apparent that the works on Chartism are not of the same scholarly merit, and that they fulfill particular needs. The Hammonds' volume, based on a wide selection of materials in all areas of English life during the period of the Chartists, shows the greatest understanding of the movement and the people who considered themselves Chartists. The years of study in this specific period well prepared the Hammonds to handle the question of "why" in regard to Chartism. Halevy has prepared the most scholarly and factual treatise of the period. His volume not only includes minute data on the Chartists but also plants the movement firmly in the midst of the main stream of nineteenth-century English history. And although Gammage's volume is somewhat biased and lacking in perspective, it remains indispensable to a student desiring to do extensive research in the movement because of its detailed and first-hand reports of the meetings, activities, and personnel of Chartism.

The fifth conclusion accepts Professor Briggs's suggestion that further research and publishing on the Chartist movement needs to be concentrated on local conditions and involvement. At the present time it is impossible to determine the strength or weakness of Chartism at any given time or to

determine why people joined themselves to the Chartist cause. Did more Chartists desire the suffrage than nationalization of land? Did more follow Lovett than O'Connor or Stephens? What really made Chartism's strength fluctuate? How did Chartism spread throughout England? These are questions that can only be resolved by careful and extensive work in local documents and statistics.

Undoubtedly the Chartist Movement is better understood today than ever before, even than it was in its contemporary world. Many aspects that are still clothed in mystery will be better known in time; that is the nature of continued scholarly research and of the interpretive writing of history.

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