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PARLIAMENT AND THE CHARTISTS

1839 - 1849

Thesis Submitted to the Faculty of Arts
in Partial Fulfilment of the Requirements for the
Degree of Master of Arts in History by:

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November 15, 1983

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ABSTRACT

Parliament and the Chartists 1839-1849. By Joan Watcham.
November 15, 1983.

The Chartists of mid-nineteenth century England comprised one of the groups of ordinary working people who had a history, and who shaped the society of which they were a part. They were, however, frequently misunderstood, ridiculed or ignored by both middle and upper classes, and in particular by the Members of Parliament whom they petitioned so frequently and with such ardour during the decade which this thesis will cover, that is 1839-1849.

Chartism was an important movement, but only a few Parliamentarians were prepared to take it seriously. This thesis will consider what the Members of Parliament had to say about the movement, and why only a few of them saw the importance of the desire of the Chartists to become actively involved in the political life of the nation.

The working classes hoped that Chartism would provide them with a means of changing the harsh conditions under which they were forced to live, and which they could not hope to change because they did not have the vote. They believed that political emancipation would bring them social emancipation, for if they could elect men to Parliament who had

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their welfare at heart then legislation would be passed to give them social justice. In Parliament, however, neither the Liberal Party nor the Conservative Party showed any enthusiasm for the cause. Debates on Chartism were thinly attended, and reflected a lack of concern on the part of most M.P.'s. Only a small group of radicals, whom I have termed "Chartist Radicals," gave the Chartists their full support.

Other M.P.'s showed an interest in the Chartist movement only if their own constituencies were affected by Chartist rioting, or if the Opposition Members saw Chartist activities as a means of embarrassing the ministry of the day. There was a small number of M.P.'s who believed that social legislation was the responsibility of the Government, while others had a genuine concern for civil rights. A small group of Conservatives was interested in an alliance with such radicals, and paternalists in both Conservative and Liberal Parties were interested in the working classes as a group for whom they should provide protection in return for deference. The majority of the parliamentarians only spoke about the Chartist cause when they thought it was threatening law and order, property or trade. Only the Chartist Radicals were prepared to accept the premise that the vote was a fundamental human right.

Research has indicated that the Parliaments of 1839-1849 were passing class-biased legislation. This thesis looks at the way parliamentarians, who were mainly upper and

middle class, reacted to the demands of the lower class Chartists. We see a group of men determined to maintain the status quo, with no understanding of the needs of the working people of England, responding to a group which was looking for a change in the suffrage as the only means of bringing about social justice for the working classes.

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INTRODUCTION

Chartism came into being at a time when social concerns were not the primary issue in Parliament, and debates on the movement were characterized by sparse attendance of M.P.'s and by a distinct lack of interest and enthusiasm. Yet the Chartists were a group of ordinary working people who had a history, and who shaped the mid-nineteenth century society of which they were a part. Chartists were frequently misunderstood, ridiculed or ignored by the middle and upper classes, and in particular by the parliamentarians whom they petitioned frequently and ardently during the decade dealt with in this thesis.

Chartism was an important movement, but only a small number chose to speak about the movement, and still fewer were prepared to take it seriously. This thesis will consider what the parliamentarians - Radicals, Repealers, Liberals, Whigs and Conservatives, had to say about the Chartists, and why only a small group saw the importance of the Chartists' desire to become involved in the political life of their country. Only a small group of radicals, termed in this thesis the "Chartist Radicals," gave the Chartists consistent support in Parliament. The majority of the parliamentarians only spoke about the Chartist cause when

they thought that it posed a threat to law and order, property or trade.

My research has indicated that the Parliaments of 1839-1849 were passing class-biased legislation, so this thesis is concerned with the way that upper and middle class parliamentarians reacted to the demands of working men. The Members of Parliament believed that it was their duty to maintain the status quo, and had no understanding of the Chartists, who believed that a radical reform of the parliamentary system was the only way that they could achieve social justice for the working classes.

The reasons for the interest in Chartism of those parliamentarians who were not in the government fall into five main categories. In the first place, the movement was widespread and was active for a period of two decades. This meant that a large number of Members found the movement at work in their own constituencies at one time or another. This prompted many questions to the Home Secretary about the government's handling of the situation, either as a means of harassing the government, or as a way of showing his constituents that an M.P. was doing his job conscientiously. The Radicals, the Liberals, the Repealers and some Conservatives were happy to seize on Chartist activities as an opportunity to embarrass the Whig ministry, although the Liberals and the majority of the Radicals were not prepared to bring the ministry down. As the M.P.'s spoke, they made statements of their views on Chartism, and it became evident

as they did so that only a small group of Radicals, (nine in number, were consistent supporters of the Chartist cause. By what they said, and by the way they cast their votes these few men could be relied upon to uphold the Chartist cause in Parliament. They will henceforth be referred to in this thesis as Chartist Radicals. Of the nine, Thomas S. Duncombe, the Radical who represented the borough of Finsbury from 1834-1861, was the most consistent and persistent in his determination to keep the Chartist movement before the House of Commons. In 1847 the Chartist Radicals were joined in the Commons by Feargus O'Connor and John Williams, who had run for election as Chartist candidates.

Secondly, the movement generated a loyalty among the working classes which had been previously unknown, and which raised the question of the condition of the workers as a serious social question which demanded the consideration of the government. This question of social justice for all interested those M.P.'s who believed that social legislation was the responsibility of government. It was this same group of parliamentarians, mainly Radicals and Liberals, who raised questions about the treatment of political prisoners and the basic civil rights of all citizens.

Next, there was conflict between those with a traditional understanding of society and politics, and those with an incrementalist view of social and political change as

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Lubenow puts it.¹ David Roberts states of the former paternalist social outlook: "Almost all Victorian paternalists held four basic assumptions about society: it should be authoritarian, hierarchic, organic and pluralistic."² Authoritarian because it demanded obedience; hierarchic because it rejected all levelling measures, and held that, "Without inequality of property there would be no incentive for the poor to work nor the wherewithal for the wealthy to rule, develop the arts of government, and do charitable works." It was organic because every part should have an appointed place, and pluralistic because it was a society in which there were many differing spheres, each with its own hierarchies.³

Thirdly, the Chartist movement was seen by some Conservatives as a tool to be used against the Melbourne and Russell ministries. F.C. Mather quotes the instance of John Walker of The Times, who, standing as a Conservative, wrested Nottingham from the Liberals with Chartist support in a by-election in April 1841.⁴ Some, though by no means all, of the Conservatives saw an alliance with the working

¹William C. Lubenow, The Politics of Government Growth, Devon: David and Charles Ltd., 1971, p. 183.

²David Roberts, Paternalism in Early Victorian England, London: Croom Helm Ltd., 1979, p. 2.

³Ibid., pp. 2-3.

⁴F.C. Mather, "The Government and the Chartists," Chartist Studies, ed. Asa Briggs, London: MacMillan and Co. Ltd., 1959, pp. 372-373.

class as a way to fight the rising middle class. A Conservative-Radical alliance seemed feasible to the idealists, all young and under the sway of Disraeli, who hearkened back to a pre-industrial golden age, and were associated with the Young England Movement. Peel, however, certainly did not see the Chartist movement as a tool to be used against the government of the day. He believed in a strong executive government; opposition for its own sake was dangerous to the country as a whole. He stood for law and order, and in the early years of Chartist discontent and agitation, Peel supported the Melbourne ministry in its endeavour to preserve "the traditional forms of constitution - the Church, the monarchy, and the House of Lords."⁵

Fourthly, the great majority of parliamentarians spoke against the Chartist movement when its activities threatened law and order, property or trade. These men came from both the Liberal and Conservative Parties, and represented all shades of opinion within those parties. Finally, the Chartist claim that the vote and the other points of the Charter were fundamental human rights was supported only by the small group of Chartist Radicals. Other parliamentarians were opposed to any significant reform of the constitution, and feared the development of a fully politicized working class.

⁵Norman Gash, Reaction and Reconstruction in English Politics, 1832-1852, Oxford: The Clarendon Press, 1965, pp. 130-131.

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There were three main peaks of activity in Parliament concerned with Chartism, which coincided with the peaks of Chartist activity in the country, and culminated in the presentation of the three great Chartist petitions. Lord Melbourne's Whig ministry with Lord John Russell and then Lord Normanby at the Home Office was in power at the time of the first peak in 1839. When Chartism reached its second peak in 1841 Peel's Conservative ministry with Sir James Graham at the Home Office was at the helm. When the movement revived again in 1848 the Liberals were in office, led by Lord John Russell, with Sir George Grey as Home Secretary. Both Liberal and Conservative governments responded with greater alacrity to reports of demonstrations, suspected arming, drilling, plotting and threats to public order than they did to reports of the distress of the working people. Neither the Liberal Party nor the Conservative Party saw social issues as being the primary concern of Parliament. They were more concerned with maintaining the status quo. As the number of independent Radicals in the House of Commons shrank steadily from 1832 to 1841, Gash quotes the dissident Radicals as claiming that "Whig and Tory politicians were becoming virtually indistinguishable."⁶ Certainly, neither party was prepared to accept the premise that the right to vote was a fundamental male right.

The two parties in Parliament were divided amongst themselves on many questions. The Conservative Party,

⁶Ibid., p. 167.

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however, spoke and voted with one voice on Chartism, except for Disraeli, who tended to be somewhat radical and non-conformist. The Conservatives consistently opposed the movement in Parliament. The Liberal Party was not so united. The Whigs, who were conservative in their outlook, took the same line as the Conservatives and opposed the Chartists most of the time. The Repeal Party, followers of Daniel O'Connell, supported the Whigs. O'Connell viewed the Chartists with hostility as his former follower Feargus O'Connor came to dominate the movement.⁷ The Irish Repealers occasionally used Chartism as a warning to the government that if repeal were not granted and Chartism crossed the Irish Sea a very dangerous situation might develop. Those Liberals (including many who are generally described by historians as Radicals) who might well be termed moderate Radicals, and were certainly more advanced in their thinking than the Whigs, were often responsive to the Chartist movement. These men supported the ballot, shorter Parliaments and improved electoral machinery, but opposed universal suffrage and would not support any drastic constitutional reform which would alter the political status quo. It was only the Chartist Radicals who were prepared to see the composition of Parliament altered by the granting of universal male suffrage. The Liberals would, however,

⁷ Angus Macintyre, The Liberator, Daniel O'Connell and the Irish Party, 1830-1847, London: Hamish Hamilton Ltd., 1965, p. 165.

support the Chartists with their votes as well as their words on minor social issues.

Lord Brougham, the former Whig minister, conformed to no pattern, and was both vociferous and unpredictable in the House of Lords. He frequently brought Chartism to the attention of the Lords. In the Commons the volume of debate on Chartism increased notably after yet another eccentric was elected as the Chartist Member for the borough of Nottingham in August 1847. Feargus O'Connor kept the Chartist cause before the House in a series of long, blustering speeches. The tragic effect that O'Connor's vacillations, rantings and unpredictability had on the movement in the country is mirrored by the effect which they had in Parliament. His bluster and egocentric behaviour in the Commons did much to discredit the movement. Nevertheless, much that he said pointed the way that workers would have to go to achieve reform in the future.

Chartism was a class-based philosophy aimed at uniting the British working classes. It was essentially a social movement, although its social ideals were less clearly defined than its political goals because the former varied according to the specific needs of different regions. Today we realize that the Chartists were the forerunners of a working-class movement. Although they "failed," in order to understand the society of which they were a part, their ideas and their presence must be acknowledged. If this holds true for one group then we must also pay attention to the

views of those parliamentarians who opposed the Chartists, for they too represented a significant part of society. There is a real difficulty involved in attempting to know the past in the framework of the twentieth century without distorting what has gone before.

The Chartists saw Parliament and the parliamentarians as an instrument of class and of class legislation. The Chartists were working within a system in which Parliament was a prime element, and yet the only possible way for the Chartists to obtain what they wanted was to get people of their own persuasion into Parliament. However, the class bias of Parliament made this virtually impossible. The parliamentary process and, indeed, the composition of Parliament at this time, were seen by the Chartist Radicals and their supporters as being inappropriate to the needs of the working classes. Parliament was, nevertheless, the only place where petitions could be presented, and the only place from which the working classes could hope to attain political freedom.

The Chartists wished to bring about radical parliamentary changes, for they believed that the political changes embodied in the Charter would lead to social changes. They were trying to perfect an imperfect system. They wanted to vote people of their own kind into Parliament to prevent class-biased legislation from being passed. However, the structure of Parliament made this difficult for them to achieve. The majority of parliamentarians were conservative

in outlook, and biased against such a change in the constitution, not merely because of self-interest, but because this was a reflection of their social outlook. All but those who held radical views believed that everyone had their allotted place in society, the aristocracy at the top, the middle class in the middle, and the lower orders at the bottom. This was divinely ordained, and there should be no attempt to tamper with this pyramid-like order. The parliamentarians therefore saw the majority of the Chartists as a mob of mindless individuals being manipulated by a few radicals who planned to upset the status quo. A few who were more romantically minded saw the Chartists as a group of dedicated people imbued with the ideology of intellectual revolutionaries or as the deferential remnants of a pre-industrial age.

Only those parliamentarians who felt strongly pro or anti-Chartist gave the movement any real measure of attention. Most parliamentarians did not feel that society was threatened, hence they could afford to treat the Chartists with a mixture of contempt, indifference and tolerance. This attitude can be seen in the reaction of both Liberal and Conservative ministries, for they showed considerable forbearance in their dealings with the Chartists.

Chapter 1

CHARTISTS, PARTIES AND MINISTRIES

In order to understand the complex interaction of Chartists and parliamentarians it is necessary to have some knowledge of the Chartist movement and of the composition of Parliament.

Chartism, a campaign to achieve democratic rights, and by implication economic and social rights, for those who had no voice in Parliament, swept across most of the United Kingdom in the late 1830's. Its object was to obtain a radical reform of the parliamentary system, so that all men would be represented, and social justice for the working classes would be legislated.

Its major political demands were encapsulated in the six points of the People's Charter, which was published in May 1838. There were the three familiar radical demands for universal male suffrage for those over twenty-one, annual parliaments, and vote by secret ballot, as well as three less frequently voiced demands. These advocated the setting up of three hundred electoral districts containing, as nearly as possible, an equal number of inhabitants, that a salary of £500 should be paid to M.P.'s, and that the sole qualification

for a candidate's nomination should be requisition by a minimum of one hundred electors.¹

The working classes looked to Chartism as a means of protesting against the harsh conditions under which they lived, and over which they had no control. Their major demands were set out clearly in the Charter, but because of the local diversity of Chartism there were many minor demands which varied from one area to another, and led to disagreements about social objectives and tactics.

There was to be pressure brought to bear upon Parliament through petitions, inquiries, submissions and invitations to public meetings. Outside Parliament there would be meetings, and lecture tours organized by well-known and respected radicals as well as massive demonstrations and processions to demonstrate the latent physical strength of the movement.² Those who believed that such a token show of strength would be sufficient to achieve their demands were known as the moral force Chartists. A small, but significant group, however, felt that this would not be enough, and that they should be prepared to use physical force to get their way.

The Chartist membership believed that the vote was a fundamental male right. They placed the blame for their

¹J.T. Ward, Chartism, London: B.T. Batsford Ltd.; 1973, pp. 84-85.

²Alex Wilson, "Chartism," Popular Movements c. 1830-1850, ed. J.T. Ward, London: MacMillan and Co. Ltd.; 1970, p. 117.

miserable living conditions upon the upper classes, who took an unfair share of the working man's labour, and were able to pass legislation favourable to themselves because they alone controlled the political power. To the Chartists, therefore, it was logical that in order to achieve social justice they must first obtain a voice in Parliament. They would then regenerate society, socially and economically, ". . . by political action to secure benevolent legislation and administration, and by educational provision, voluntary action and self-help."³

Early Chartism had its greatest impact in areas where long-established industry was dwindling, such as Trowbridge in Wiltshire, where the cloth trade had been adversely affected by technological change; or where it was expanding, as in the industrial areas of the North. Its appeal also depended to some extent upon the charisma of the local leaders, the composition of the work force, the local working conditions, and the extent of unemployment at any given time.⁴ It was, as Asa Briggs observes, ". . . a snowball movement which gathered together local grievances and sought to give them common expression in a nation-wide agitation."⁵

³Ibid., p. 116.

⁴Asa Briggs, "The Local Background of Chartism," Chartist Studies, ed. Asa Briggs, London: MacMillan and Co. Ltd., 1959, p. 3.

⁵Ibid., p. 2.

There was a real attempt to create a feeling of class unity between the craftsmen, the factory workers and the domestic outworkers, but this never wholly succeeded. The highly respectable craftsmen, often non-conformist in religious affiliation, found it difficult to unite or to find common bonds with what they considered to be inferior groups. The factory workers had a feeling of solidarity and comradeship because of common experiences on the factory floor, while the outworkers simply related the demand for universal suffrage to their need for adequate food and shelter.⁶

At a meeting of Lancashire Chartists, Rayner Stephens declared that universal suffrage was "... a knife and fork question, a bread and cheese question, ... every working man in the land has a right to a good coat on his back, a good hat on his head, a good roof for the shelter of his household ...".⁷ Such statements were later used against the Chartists by those who feared to what use the left-wing might put any new-found political power. Such people feared that if universal suffrage were granted the workers would plunder and destroy property.

It is difficult to know what Chartism meant to its adherents, for this is a complex problem requiring much research. To some it probably was a matter of class

⁶Ibid., p. 9.

⁷Manchester Guardian, September 26, 1838.

consciousness and ideology, and these people would think in terms of class power and class exploitation. To others, however, the importance of Chartism lay mainly in local concerns and enthusiasms.

In spite of regional enthusiasm there was little national unity. The rank and file came mainly from the working class, while the leadership included "landowners, magistrates, doctors, parsons, merchants, small manufacturers, shopkeepers, school teachers, editors, publishers and poets,"⁸ as well as craftsmen and officials of various trade unions. The problem of national communication was a very difficult one, and only Feargus O'Connor, with his influential newspaper the Northern Star and his nation-wide chain of agents and correspondents, was able to keep in touch with the feelings of the localities.

The willingness of the Chartists to be practical and self-reliant was a conspicuous characteristic of the movement. Locally Chartism was often, ". . . an integral part of the struggle for identity, dignity and improvement."⁹ Chartist leaders articulated widely-held feelings about "the disruption of family life, the exploitation of women, the waste of talent and the degradation of human beings."¹⁰ These men had a

⁸Wilson, p. 117.

⁹David Jones, Chartism and the Chartists, London: Penguin Books Ltd., 1975, p. 188.

¹⁰Ibid.

vision of an alternative society in which science and machinery could be used to benefit all. They offered a more democratic, humanitarian and co-operative society to those who would support their demands.

The Chartists denounced both Liberals and Conservatives, and both political parties looked on the Chartists as enemies of private property, and as a threat to law and order. Ministerialists and Opposition alike disdained the Chartists' power, initiative and their strong belief that the political liberation of the country lay in their hands. Even when Chartists and Liberals spoke in the same terms or co-operated on a particular issue, the former were always aware of " . . . differences in emphasis, meaning and power."¹¹ Chartists respected the Radicals, but they preferred to remain independent.

Professor Gash quotes the following analysis of the composition of the House of Commons from the Annual Register of 1837. There were 332 Ministerialists and 319 Conservatives. These Members plus the Speaker and six vacant seats made up a grand total of 658.¹² By 1840 F.R. Bonham, the Conservative party agent, estimated that there were only eight independent Radicals separate from the Government party.¹³

¹¹Ibid., pp. 189-190.

¹²Norman Gash, Reaction and Reconstruction in English Politics, 1832-1852, Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1965, p. 168.

¹³Ibid., pp. 204-205.

As Gash succinctly states the year 1832 had seen a "redefinition of party,"¹⁴ and the foundations for the Victorian two-party system were laid by the divisions of politicians into Reformers and Conservatives over the Bill of 1831.¹⁵ The Conservative Party supported the Established Church in England and in Ireland, and the traditional institutions of the country, which included the House of Lords.¹⁶ The Conservative Party drew support from land-owners, property owners, the manufacturing and financial classes and the professions.

The Liberal Party included Whigs, who were on the Liberal side of the House because of family connections. They were fundamentally aristocratic and conservative, a party of the right, which consistently opposed the Chartists. The Liberals within the party were more advanced than the Whigs, but would not support any constitutional reform. They were prepared to look favourably upon the Chartists as long as this did not involve any serious changes in the constitution. The Radicals, those Members of the Liberal Party who would consistently support some extension of the suffrage, the provision of a secret ballot and a substantial alteration in the Corn Laws, were generally inclined to favour the Chartists, but could not be relied on to give them consistent support. The Radicals neither acted nor voted together consistently. Joseph Hamburger quotes the Radical

¹⁴Ibid., p. 122. ¹⁵Ibid., p. 123. ¹⁶Ibid., p. 133.

editor, John Wade, who in 1835 stated that they were "a disorganized mass" and lamented the fact that they had "no leader in whose superior character and ability"¹⁷ they could acquiesce. Albany Fonblanque in the Examiner of May 19, 1833 also regretted that, "in the Radical Party there is this peculiarity that nearly all are leaders."¹⁸

The Irish Repealers, led by Daniel O'Connell were also part of the Liberal Party. The thirty-two Members returned in the 1837 election¹⁹ formed an effective political pressure group dedicated to the repeal of the Act of Union. The Lichfield House Compact of 1835 had seen the Irish Liberals, including the Repealers, give their support to the Whigs, and the Repealers followed the Whig lead in Parliament by opposing Chartism and supporting the Anti-Corn Law League. Within the Liberal Party only the Chartist Radicals were prepared to support the Chartists' demands consistently, and even some of these supporters disliked and opposed the Chartists' use of force.

These Chartist Radicals were as follows: Thomas Attwood, the M.P. for Birmingham from 1832-1840, when he accepted the Chiltern Hundreds. He was by profession a banker, and he believed that the twin causes of distress

¹⁷ Joseph Hamburger, Intellectuals in Politics, John Stuart Mill and the Philosophical Radicals, New Haven: Yale University Press, 1965, pp. 117-118.

¹⁸ Ibid., p. 118.

¹⁹ Angus Macintyre, The Liberator, Daniel O'Connell and the Irish Party 1830-1847, London: Hamish Hamilton Ltd., 1965, p. 299.

were the high cost of food and the high cost of money. He believed that the currency should be expanded by the issue of more paper money, and that the Corn Laws should be repealed. Joshua Scholefield, who represented Birmingham from 1832-1844, was a disciple of Attwood and supported his policy of currency reform. In order to advance their cause they were prepared to support the Chartist demands, but the working classes seemed to have little interest in currency reform, and it was gradually shelved.²⁰

John Fielden represented the Lancashire town of Oldham from 1832 until his defeat in the election of 1847. He and his brother owned spinning and weaving mills in nearby Todmorden. They treated their workers with Owenite benevolence, and believed in free trade. John Fielden's remedy for the distress of the workers was a reduction in national expenditure and the substitution of a property tax for duties on articles of general consumption. He also believed in factory reform and Anti-Poor Law agitation as a panacea for misery rather than adopting the Chartist demands for civil and political rights.²¹ He was not a good orator, but he was a man of great simplicity and integrity, known as "honest John Fielden." Certainly his pertinacious support of the Chartists shows why those who disliked him called him the

²⁰ Mark Hovell, The Chartist Movement, Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1918, pp. 100-102.

²¹ Ibid., pp. 86-87.

"self-acting mule."²² Both Attwood and Fielden, because of their special interests, were often attacked by Lord John Russell as eccentrics.

Thomas Slingsby Duncombe came from the landed gentry, being the eldest son of Lord Feversham's younger brother and the daughter of the Bishop of Petersburg. His family connections were described as "ultra-Tory." He was educated at Harrow, then became an ensign with the House Guards. He became known as a man of fashion who belonged to gambling clubs and enjoyed the Sport of Kings.²³ With such a background it was unexpected to see him become a Liberal and then a Radical. His son suggests that the young Ensign Duncombe was influenced by Sir Ronald Ferguson under whom he served and who was a consistent Liberal.²⁴

He stood as a Whig from 1826-1832 when he was defeated in Hertford. He had always been radical in outlook, and in 1832 Lord Salisbury intervened to get him out of the borough even though he was popular with the electorate. In 1834 he ran for Finsbury as a Liberal and polled 599 votes more than his closest rival. He was regarded as one of the principal Liberals,²⁵ and became increasingly concerned with

²²Dictionary of National Biography, vol. 6, pp. 1279-1280.

²³T.S. Duncombe, The Life and Correspondence of Thomas Slingsby Duncombe, vol. 1, ed. T.H. Duncombe, London: Hurst and Blackett, 1868, p. 87.

²⁴Ibid., p. 69

²⁵Ibid., p. 796.

the distress of the working people and more and more interested in the Chartist cause. In the spring of 1841, he "... cast in his lot with the extreme Radical party."²⁶ He was a consistent supporter of the Charter, but not of any use of force. Even when Chartism began to collapse he did not relax his exertions. In 1843 he became a member of the National Chartist Association of Great Britain. He addressed many Chartist demonstrations and was recognized by them as a hero.²⁷ It was not until April 10, 1848 that Duncombe finally washed his hands of the Chartists. He had been ill and had retired to Sidmouth, and from there he had sent a letter of warning addressed to Feargus O'Connor which was circulated in London prior to the Kennington Common Meeting which ended thus:

Think! Think! Think!
and remember - that one false
step may seal the fate of millions.²⁸

However, O'Connor went ahead with his plans and Duncombe gave up the Chartist cause, though he continued as an active supporter of the rights of labour.

Henry Ward, another Chartist Radical, was in the diplomatic service until he entered Parliament as M.P. for St. Albans until 1839, and then as the representative for Sheffield until 1849. He always had a reputation for being an advanced Liberal. He was hostile to the Irish Church, and

²⁶ Ibid., p. 312. ²⁷ Ibid., p. 363. ²⁸ Ibid., pp. 374-375.

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annually moved a resolution which reflected this attitude.²⁹
Joseph Hamburger sees him as being a Member who was close to
the Philosophic Radicals.³⁰

Joseph Hume was in the service of the East India
Company until he began a political career in 1811. In the
1820's he joined the group known as Philosophic Radicals,
who considered themselves both philosophers and politicians.³¹
Hume too was interested in finance. He was patient and
industrious, and made innumerable long and badly constructed
speeches and long supported the Chartists. John Leader, who
did not enter Parliament until 1835, was also one of the
Philosophic Radical circle which represented an ideological
position which defined the way democratic government was to
be achieved, by the realignment of parties and the creation
of a new Radical party.³²

These were the few parliamentarians who were prepared
to take the Chartist movement seriously, and who kept the
movement before the House of Commons. They recognized and
supported the Chartist desire to become actively involved in
the political life of the nation.

Thomas Wakley became the Member of Parliament for
Finsbury in 1835, and remained so until he retired from

²⁹Dictionary of National Biography, vol. 20, pp. 773-
774.

³⁰Hamburger, p. 134.

³¹Ibid., p. 2.

³²Ibid.

Parliament in 1852. He was a well-known surgeon who founded the Lancet in 1823. He was an ardent reformer who hated injustice, especially when it was allied with power, and pointed out what he considered to be abuses with great vigour. He had strong sympathies with the Chartists, advocated repeal of Irish Union, and opposed the Corn Laws.³³ Dr. John Bowring, linguist, writer and traveller, was a joint editor of Jeremy Bentham's Westminster Review. He first entered Parliament in 1835 and represented Bolton from 1841-1849, when he was appointed consul at Canton. He was responsible for obtaining the issue of the florin as the first step towards the introduction of the decimal system into English currency.³⁴

The Liberals, traditionally the party of liberty, were anxious not to appear repressive in their dealings with popular movements. When Chartism first came to the fore, Lord Melbourne's second Liberal ministry was in power. Lord John Russell, as Home Secretary, embodied this desire not to appear to encroach on the people's freedom to discuss questions of politics, nor to lose the Liberal reputation for enlightenment. He therefore tolerated violent speeches and wild meetings as long as no rioting took place. As he made clear in a letter to the Earl of Harewood in September 1838,

³³ Dictionary of National Biography, vol. 20, pp. 461-465.

³⁴ Ibid., vol. 2, pp. 984-988.

Russell believed that it was better " . . . not to add to the importance of these mob leaders by prosecutions."³⁵

It was not until the end of November 1838, when torchlight meetings and rioting occurred on the Yorkshire-Lancashire borders, that the Liberal ministry took repressive action against the Chartists. It is worth noting that at the time Lord John Russell, preoccupied with his wife's failing health, was absent from the Home Office, and Lord Melbourne had taken over the responsibility for maintaining law and order. Philip Ziegler, in his biography of Melbourne, states his belief that Melbourne was always willing to act quickly if in his view a grouping of citizens became a threat to the security of the state.³⁶ He prosecuted some of the ringleaders, and a royal proclamation made torchlight processions illegal. When Russell returned to the Home Office in the New Year he concluded that there was little serious danger of insurrection.

In April 1839, however, Chartist unrest intensified, and the attitude of the Government changed accordingly. Magistrates were encouraged to seize arms and to arrest offenders. The general commanding the northern district was

³⁵F.C. Mather, "The Government and the Chartists," Chartist Studies, ed. Asa Briggs, London: MacMillan and Co. Ltd., 1959, p. 375.

³⁶Philip Ziegler, Melbourne, A Biography of William Lamb, 2nd Viscount Melbourne, New York: Alfred A. Knopf Inc., 1976, p. 156.

given the power to draw up a plan to defend the area against insurrection.³⁷ The crisis passed, and by June all was quiet again, until Parliament's rejection of the Chartist Petition in July led to a further deterioration in the situation.

The Government brought in a bill to establish a rural police force in July 1839, and asked for a loan to provide aid for the Birmingham police, and for the addition of 5,000 men to the regular army.³⁸ As the situation quietened the Home Office reverted to more moderate treatment of the Chartists.

When the Newport Rising took place in November 1839, however, Russell was no longer Home Secretary. His successor, Lord Normanby, allowed Lord Melbourne to influence his decisions, and the latter believed that the peace was seriously threatened. Ziegler quotes Melbourne's statement in a cabinet meeting on January 9, 1840, that he felt it was time for strong measures, and that he was ready to take them.³⁹ By the middle of 1840 the power of the movement was temporarily broken. Melbourne realized, however, that the root causes of the disorders had not been eliminated at a time when the balance of power in the Commons could not long be sustained.

³⁷ Mather, pp. 378-379.

³⁸ Hansard, Third Series, vol. 49, Tuesday, July 23, p. 691.

³⁹ Ziegler, p. 309.

When Chartism peaked for the second time in 1841, Peel's Conservative ministry had taken office, and Sir James Graham was at the Home Office. The second Chartist Petition³ was presented and rejected by Parliament in 1842, and was followed by strikes for higher wages and better working conditions. When it became apparent that law and order were in danger of breaking down, the Government took action.

The Conservative Government was not content merely to arrest individuals but "... adopted bold and carefully thought-out measures designed to bring the entire outbreak to an end."⁴⁰ The Duke of Wellington planned to demoralize the insurgents by sowing mutual distrust amongst them. He suggested that magistrates should pay informers to divulge the names of leaders of the outbreaks, so that their names could be paraded amongst the rioters to prove that they had been informed on by their own people. In August 1842 a Royal Proclamation offering a reward of £50 for the apprehension and conviction of the leaders of any violent action during the strike in Manchester was issued. Graham also ordered the arrest of the members of the Manchester Trades Conference, whom he saw as the link between the Trade Unions and the Chartists.⁴¹ These repressive measures produced a partial return to tranquility, and the Government set out to prove that there had been a treasonable conspiracy, but

⁴⁰ Mather, p. 389.

⁴¹ Ibid.

without success, and when warrants were issued in October, 1842, they were for conspiracy only.

The next major revival of Chartism came in 1848 when the Liberals under Lord John Russell were again in power. Chartism, though weaker than in 1839, had become linked with discontent in Ireland. The Irish saw that if the Chartists kept up a state of unrest on the mainland it would divert attention and troops from the disturbances in Ireland. On April 10, 1848 the London Irish marched to Kennington Common, where they were addressed by Julian Harney, one of the most articulate of the London Chartists.⁴² This co-operation between the Irish and the Chartists did not go unnoticed by the Government, nevertheless the Liberals continued to treat the Chartists with restraint and forbearance.

Chartists were allowed to march in procession to Kennington Common, and only the procession to Parliament to present their petition was forbidden. The Government was also slow to prosecute Chartist leaders, even when their speeches seemed to be urging the people to take up arms. This suggests that although the Russell ministry was concerned with maintaining peace, it did not take the Chartist threat very seriously. Although Liberals and Conservatives differed in their reaction to Chartism as a disruptive force in the country, they did not differ in their belief that a franchise based on numbers rather than on property would be detrimental to Britain's constitution.

⁴²Ibid., p. 39.

Modern scholars see a two-party polarity being formed in the struggle over the 1832 Reform Bill. Wellington's insistence on pushing through Roman Catholic emancipation caused the crisis which split his followers. It allowed Grey's Liberal Party to take power, and led to the passing of the Reform Act. From 1835 to 1846 there were two fairly clearly defined parties in Parliament. They each tried to form the government by winning a majority at a general election. J.C.D. Clark claims that it was the "identification of parties with both government and opposition, interchangeably, which marked the emergence of a modern aspect of party government in the 1830's."⁴³ The reformed electoral structure of 1832 led to new techniques of party organization, and to the emergence of recognizable party. The regular consultation of leaders and occasional general party meetings led to some co-ordination of tactics and a greater feeling of unity.

The Conservative Party stood for a strong executive, determined to preserve the traditional form of the British constitution, that is the established church, the monarchy and the House of Lords rather than any fiscal, administrative or social programme.⁴⁴ However, the problems the Conservatives had to face when they came to power in 1841 were the

⁴³J.C.D. Clark, "A General Theory of Party, Opposition, and Government," The Historical Journal, 23, 2(1980), p. 324.

⁴⁴Gash, p. 131.

practical ones of trade, finance, unemployment and the question of Ireland.

The country squires backed Peel, often grudgingly, as he met the immediate needs of tariff reform and industrial legislation, until he jeopardized their pocketbooks and their political traditions as he came to realize, that regardless of party or public opinion the Corn Laws must be repealed. The Conservative split over agricultural protection in 1845-6 produced "a more fundamental realignment of forces than is often recognized. The party system then generated survived, essentially, until the crisis over the Second Reform Bill in the late 1860's."⁴⁵

The first split came in 1845 over Maynooth, when Peel affronted one of the deepest prejudices of the Conservative Party, that is Protestantism. In 1795 the Irish Parliament had initiated an annual grant to the Catholic seminary at Maynooth, and this contribution to the education of Irish priests had been continued by the British Parliament after the Act of Union. In 1845 it was £9,000 per annum, and Peel proposed to increase it to £26,000. The bill was carried in both Houses, but many Conservatives were opposed and it would have been defeated on the third reading but for Liberal support. On this reading the Conservatives divided 149-148 against.⁴⁶ In 1846 Peel affronted another Conservative

⁴⁵Clark, p. 297.

⁴⁶Robert Blake, The Conservative Party from Peel to Churchill, London: Eyre and Spottiswoode Ltd., 1970, pp. 52-53.

prejudice, agricultural protection. In that year 241 Conservatives voted against Peel's bill to abolish the Corn Laws over a period of three years.⁴⁷ The measure passed the Commons with the support of the Whigs, the Irish and the free traders, and it passed the Lords with the support of Wellington. After its passage Peel felt that he could no longer control the legislature; the vengeful Conservatives united with the Whigs and the Irish to defeat Peel on an Irish Coercion Bill and he resigned. Gash sees the 1830's as a period when it became clear that a national political party had to be diverse enough to represent and harmonize varied interests, and that until the Conservatives were ready to shake off their protectionist mantle they could not hope to become a national party.⁴⁸

For the Liberals, too, the 1830's was a time of change. Many of the Whigs remained within the Liberal Party because of family connections, or because they believed in the Whig concept of Tory misrule and Whig opposition. There was, too, . . . the idea of a liberal minority of the aristocracy, which stood for civil and religious liberty, and could in time of crisis save their order and their country by representing and controlling popular movements."⁴⁹

⁴⁷William O. Aydelotte, "Voting Patterns in the British House of Commons in the 1840's," Comparative Studies in Society and History, vol. 5, no. 2, January 1963, p. 152.

⁴⁸Gash, p. 154.

⁴⁹Ibid., p. 162.

This seems to have been a widely held conception. The Liberal Party's parliamentary leadership was mainly Whig, aristocratic and conservative in outlook. Its electoral base in the country, and its natural political allies, however, were more heterogeneous. The Liberals lost their control of the English counties in the 1835 election, and became dependent on urban and non-English constituencies for their support. Their problem was, therefore, to evolve "a brand of Liberalism which would guide Radicalism into manageable paths."⁵⁰

Radicalism itself was extremely diffuse in its philosophies; there was no one radical philosophy. In spite of their differences, however, the Radicals played a considerable role in the 1830's and 1840's in various political and social causes. There were some strange alliances too, for example when the ultra-Tory, Richard Oastler, collaborated with the ultra-Radicals over industrial reform.⁵¹

Party commanded a substantial measure of loyalty in the Chartist era, even though major events could upset such allegiance. Nevertheless between 1835 and 1845 in particular there was a measure of party order which sets this decade apart.

It was during this period that the Home Office had to deal with a flow of information from local authorities

⁵⁰ Ibid., pp. 164-166.

⁵¹ J.T. Ward, "Introduction: Britain c. 1830-1850: The Background," Popular Movements c. 1830-1850, ed. J.T. Ward, London: MacMillan & Co. Ltd., 1970, p. 17.

about Chartist demonstrations, plots and threats. Liberal and Conservative ministries alike responded more to reports which suggested that public order might be threatened than they did to reports of social distress. Large meetings were considered dangerous when they seemed to threaten the peace; mere speeches, though often deliberately inflammatory, were usually ignored by most politicians.

What then was the reaction, and what were the feelings of parliamentarians who were not in the current ministry when the subject of Chartism was discussed in Parliament?

Chapter 2

THE PARLIAMENTARIANS' RESPONSE TO CHARTISM'S

FIRST PEAK - 1839-1840

William Aydelotte points out that "... the central issue of politics was not the welfare of the poor, but the divergent interests of the rich."¹ Gash agrees with this opinion and states that

... when the plight of the poor and defenceless came under the attention of the legislature the general attitude of the politicians was pragmatic and undocinaire, and their solutions, therefore, were piecemeal and experimental improvisations.²

Parliament was, however, interested in maintaining law and order, and Mather sees its function as being twofold in character. By taking legislative action it would strengthen the powers of both central and local authorities, and by questioning the ministers of the Crown, receiving petitions, and authorizing inquiries, it would control the exercise of power both centrally and locally.³

¹William O. Aydelotte, "Voting Patterns in the British House of Commons in the 1840's," Comparative Studies in Society and History, vol. 5, no. 2, January 1963, p. 157.

²Norman Gash, Reaction and Reconstruction in English Politics, 1832-1852, Oxford: The Clarendon Press, 1965, p. 129.

³F.C. Mather, Public Order in the Age of the Chartists, Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1959, p. 29.

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The 1830's was period of stagnation of real wages, for although industrial output was increasing, food was having to be imported and investments were financing exports not cheapening goods for the home market. Eighteen thirty-seven was a year of depression and unemployment and was followed by a bad harvest in 1838-39.⁴

Chartist unrest began to spread. However, the parliamentarians did little to put pressure upon the Liberal ministry, and references to the Chartist disturbances in this period are surprisingly few. In December 1837, John Fielden accused the Government of having failed in its duty by not inquiring into the Anti-Poor Law riots which had occurred in the West Riding of Yorkshire.⁵ Fielden, the Chartist Radical Member for Oldham in Lancashire, and co-owner of spinning and weaving mills in Todmorden, was in some ways quite conservative in his outlook, but as a free trader he was classed as a Radical in Parliament.⁶ It is worth noting that neither of the two Liberal M.P.'s who represented the West Riding, Viscount Morpeth and Sir George Strickland, had considered the matter sufficiently important to raise a question in the House. Perhaps it is also worth noting that in the 1841

⁴Ibid., pp. 4-5.

⁵Hansard, Third Series, vol. 39, p. 948.

⁶Mark Hovell, The Chartist Movement, Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1918, p. 161.

general election Viscount Morpeth was defeated, and Sir George did not run.⁷

In the spring of 1839, when accounts of the arming of Chartists in the Northern manufacturing districts was rife, the parliamentarians still showed little interest, and the matter was only raised four times in the Commons. The first question was raised by the arch-reactionary Conservative M.P. for Lincoln, Colonel C.D.W. Sibthorp on April 8, 1839. He demanded to know what action the Whig Ministry was taking to deal with the Chartists who were arming in the Manchester area. As a result the Home Secretary, Lord John Russell tabled a letter which he had sent to the Lords-Lieutenants of the Counties.⁸

It was not until April 30 that the Chartist disturbances were again discussed. This time it was Viscount Dungannon, the Conservative Member for the city of Durham, who brought up the "seditious and inflammatory" language which had been used by speakers at a Chartist meeting at Smithfield.⁹ The House showed little enthusiasm for discussing the matter, and it was left to Thomas Attwood, the Birmingham banker, founder of the Birmingham Political Union, and Radical Member for that Midland city, to defend the actions of the Whig Home Secretary. Lord John Russell.

⁷Charles R. Dod, Electoral Facts 1832-1853 Impartially Stated, Brighton: The Harvester Press Ltd., 1972, p. 360.

⁸Hansard, Third Series, vol. 46, Monday, April 8, 1839, p. 1239.

⁹Ibid., vol. 47, p. 682.

had indeed increased his vigilance in the early months of 1839. He had authorized the opening of the mail of Hartwell, Richardson, Vincent and Wade, prominent Chartists, but had refused to agree to the magistrates' demand for a full-scale attack on the Chartists.¹⁰

Attwood suggested to the House that the appeals to arms had come from "the intense eloquence" of some Chartist speakers, but this was not the general feeling of the majority. He stated his belief that the speeches of the physical force hotheads had been used by "Tories, Radicals and Neutrals" for their own purposes.¹¹ He thus implied that these groups were trying to discredit both the Chartists and the Liberals.

On May 6 the Liberal Ministry survived a Commons division on the Jamaican constitution by a mere five votes, and Melbourne resigned. As a result the presentation of the Chartists' National Petition to Parliament was delayed. The delegates, who were attending the Chartist Convention in London, moved to Birmingham, perhaps because they feared what might happen to them if they remained in London and the Conservatives formed a government. In Birmingham excited crowds gathered in the Bull Ring every day to be harangued by fiery orators.

¹⁰ J.T. Ward, Chartism, London: B.T. Batsford Ltd., 1973, p. 121.

¹¹ Hansard, Third Series, vol. 47, Tuesday, April 30, 1839, pp. 682-684.

Peel was unable to form a Conservative Ministry, and on May 13, 1839, the Liberal Ministers resumed office. Two days later a motion was made to adjourn the House until May 27, thus the presentation of the Chartist Petition was again delayed, and when the Rt. Hon. Williams Wynn, Conservative M.P. for Montgomeryshire and an acknowledged expert on parliamentary law and precedent, protested against the rashness of adjourning Parliament at such a time; he was ignored. Wynn believed that local magistrates should be given further powers to deal with uprisings before the House adjourned, and he consequently voted against adjournment when the House divided on May 15.¹²

Sir Harry Verney, the Liberal Member for Buckingham, asked if the Government planned to establish a more effective rural police force to maintain order,¹³ and Thomas Attwood, long labelled as a crank, who believed that the police force had been organized in order to repress protests and to nip sedition in the bud,¹⁴ asked if it intended to introduce new penal measures. Attwood felt that the present laws were quite sufficient to deal with the situation, and believed that further measures might inflame the people.

¹²Ibid., Wednesday, May 15, 1839, pp. 1025-1026.

¹³Ibid., p. 1027.

¹⁴Hovell, p. 100.

Attwood suggested that appeals for the use of physical force had come from the "intense eloquence" of some Irish orators, and that such speeches had been distorted by those who wanted to encourage the spread of rumours about Chartists taking up arms.¹⁵ Joseph Hume, the Chartist Radical Member for Kilkenny, supported Attwood, and expressed it as his opinion that the widespread agitation had been caused by a few hotheads who had misled the people. He, too, opposed any modification of the existing laws.¹⁶

The Commons showed no wish to prolong discussion of the matter. Of the three Liberal M.P.'s who spoke at this time the two Radicals acted as tellers for the ayes on the motion to adjourn, and the third, Sir Harry Verney, voted for the motion.

Certain right-wing Conservatives continued to harry the Government over its lack of action in dealing with the physical-force Chartists. On June 6, 1839 Viscount Dungannon demanded that the House should see any communications from the local authorities about the assembling and arming of Chartists.¹⁷ Colonel Sibthorp supported this motion, and he charged that Russell's refusal to comply with the request suggested that there was "something behind the curtain" and

¹⁵Hansard, Third Series, vol. 47, Wednesday, May 15, 1839, p. 1027.

¹⁶Ibid., p. 1028.

¹⁷Ibid., vol. 48, Thursday, June 6, 1839, pp. 32-33.

that the Home Secretary should make a statement to the House.¹⁸

Thomas Wakley, the Chartist Radical Member for Finsbury, supported the Conservative demands for a statement on the arming of the Chartists, not because he wanted to embarrass the Whig Ministry, but because he believed that the accounts of the numbers involved had been greatly exaggerated, and because he refused to believe that so many of the workers could be misled in this way.¹⁹ The Liberal M.P. for Walsall, Francis Finch, stated his belief that the press had exaggerated the numbers who were alleged to be arming. Upon receiving assurances from the Home Secretary that the state of affairs in the area was satisfactory, Dungannon withdrew his motion.²⁰ Fears for the security of persons and property were allayed for a time.

On June 14, 1839 came the long-awaited event. Attwood believed sincerely in the political demands of the Chartists because he felt that the demand for good living conditions for the workers would never be given primacy by the politicians until the latter were made responsible to a universal adult male electorate. By the time this document reached Parliament there were 1,280,000 signatures affixed to it. Attwood accused the House of ignoring the social distress which was at the root of working class discontent. He made clear his belief that the wishes of the working classes had been

¹⁸Ibid., p. 33. ¹⁹Ibid. ²⁰Ibid., pp. 33-34.

disregarded in the past because they had no political voice. He stated his whole-hearted support for the six points of the Charter, while repudiating "any use of force to achieve its ends."²¹

The National Petition said that Chartists sought a fair day's wage for a fair day's work, and that if they could not have that, as well as food and clothing for their families, then they would lawfully try to change the representation of the House. The Chartists observed that the country denied them one-quarter the value of their labour. The petition was duly tabled.²²

Sir George Smith, Conservative Member for Colchester, protested that Attwood had broken a House rule by making a speech when presenting a petition. Even amongst Essex Chartists there was a "keen suspicion of the extremism of the industrial north,"²³ and Sir George ridiculed the immense petition, which had been rolled into the House as, "that ridiculous piece of machinery."²⁴ This attitude echoes the view of Chartism as melodramatic and even farcical, which Alex Wilson suggests was fairly widely held, both in the House and in the country. From time to time respectable

²¹Ibid., pp. 222-225.

²²Ibid., p. 225.

²³Hugh Fearn, "Chartism in Suffolk," Chartist Studies, ed. Asa Briggs, London: MacMillan and Co. Ltd., 1959, p. 172.

²⁴Hansard, Third Series, vol. 48, p. 226.

society enjoyed a laugh at the folly, discomfiture and disappointment of the Chartists. There certainly seems to have been a propensity for both upper and middle classes to look down their noses at this lower class attempt at self-assertion.²⁵

On June 25, 1839 the Tory Earl Stanhope rose in the Lords to present several petitions in favour of manhood suffrage and the secret ballot, and thus provided the Members of the Upper House with an opportunity to air their opinions. At the time of the passing of the Reform Bill he had warned the House that unless Parliament redressed these grievances then arguments for Parliamentary reform would be unanswerable. The composition, character and conduct of the Commons had now lost the confidence of the people and merited only their contempt.

Stanhope himself was opposed to the concept of manhood suffrage; because he believed it would give one class sufficient power, which, if it chose to use physical force, would leave property without protection. He did, however, believe that every class should be represented in Parliament, but without the danger of one class being swamped by another. Like many who were concerned with administrative continuity Stanhope favoured triennial over annual Parliaments.

Stanhope asked the Lords to consider why the working classes were demanding parliamentary reform, and taking to

²⁵Alex Wilson, "Chartism," Popular Movements c. 1830-1850, ed. J.T. Ward, London: MacMillan and Co. Ltd., 1970, p. 131.

arms. He believed that the people had been angered by the New Poor Law, by the desperate condition of the hand-loom weavers, by poor conditions in the factories, and by the attitude of Parliament. He felt that the poor had been misled into believing that universal suffrage would cure all these ills, but he contended that the suffrage should be extended by giving the right of voting by class.²⁶

It should be remembered that Stanhope had dreamed of a national federation of Anti-Poor Law societies pledged to repeal the Act of 1834, and he took this opportunity of airing his strong feelings on the plight of the poor. He also, being a convinced protectionist,²⁷ made clear his disagreement with the free-traders' promise that a free system would improve the workers' standard of living, or that open foreign markets were needed to ensure Britain's economic well-being.²⁸

Stanhope was followed by Lord Brougham, one-time Whig minister, and long-time eccentric with a thirst for fame and notoriety and a gift for powerful oratory. He had long been identified with a radical demand for change and advocacy of liberal causes. He agreed with Stanhope that as a result of the Reform Act many were unrepresented in

²⁶ Hansard, Third Series, vol. 48, Tuesday, June 25, 1839, pp. 799-807.

²⁷ Robert Stewart, The Politics of Protection, London: Cambridge University Press, 1971, p. 14.

²⁸ Hansard, Third Series, vol. 48, pp. 807-809.

Parliament, and that the Government seemed to be determined to oppose further reform. Brougham lacked stability and balance, and could be as embarrassing to his political friends as to his political enemies. His promotion to the highest judicial office in the Kingdom in 1830 had been seen by many as a move to place him in a position where he could cause less trouble than he had in the Commons as M.P. for Yorkshire.²⁹ The chief criticism against him was that he attempted too much and knew too little about too many subjects.³⁰

Brougham stated that any intelligent well-informed man should have the right to vote; a philosophical decision well-nigh impossible to implement. He considered the payment of M.P.'s and the removal of property qualifications for Members to be unimportant, perhaps for the wealthy, landed classes, but not for those of lesser means. Nevertheless, he opposed annual parliaments because the expense of annual elections would favour those with a "long purse," which shows his lack of balanced reasoning. Brougham felt that the Lords should consider the petitions from the unrepresented classes seriously, but he saw no danger of revolution. He believed

²⁹ Arthur Aspinall, Lord Brougham and the Whig Party, Manchester: University of Manchester Press, 1927, pp. 187-188.

³⁰ Ibid. p. 253.

that the people were "perfectly tranquil" in spite of a small group of mischief-makers who had tried to fan the spark of revolt.³¹

Stanhope disagreed with Brougham on this point. He believed that the people had been brought to the point of revolution by poverty and unemployment. In spite of his apparent sympathy for the masses he informed the Lords that he had refused to present the National Convention's petition to the House because he could not conscientiously support its principles.³²

The Duke of Wellington categorically stated his own position on the side of law and order. He agreed with Melbourne that the extension of the suffrage was not in the best interests of the country, and that a secret ballot was an "obnoxious un-English measure."³³ Stanhope realized that the majority of the Members of the Lords were, like Wellington, law and order men, and had not brought forward any measures because he knew that they would have no chance of success. It would seem that his anger was directed against the social conditions caused by the 1834 Poor Law rather than against the parliamentary system. Stanhope seemed to look back nostalgically to a pre-industrial age of paternalism and protection, and a fully politicized working class would not fit into his picture of society.

³¹Hansard, Third Series, vol. 48, Tuesday, June 25, 1839, pp. 809-825.

³²Ibid., pp. 825-826. ³³Ibid., pp. 826-827.

On July 4, 1839 trouble flared up in Birmingham. On that day the Mayor arrived in the city with sixty London policemen to find a noisy Chartist meeting in progress in the Bull Ring. The police were ordered to clear the crowd, and a riot ensued, which eventually necessitated the use of troops. Taylor, McDouall and other Chartists were arrested, and more Metropolitan police arrived in the city on July 5. Lovett, the leader of the moral force Chartists, spoke up against the magistrates, and he too was arrested.³⁴

As a result of the events in Birmingham law and order questions were raised in the Commons. On July 9 Sir Robert Peel, the Conservative leader, asked the Home Secretary to disclose how many men from the Metropolitan police had been sent to Birmingham. He recommended caution in the use of the London police, so that their character and efficiency would not be compromised by having to deal with large assemblies in unfamiliar towns.³⁵

Lord John Russell explained that the Government hoped to see a national police force established, and until that could be arranged the Metropolitan police would be called upon.³⁶ This brought the Conservative Member for Middlesex, Captain Thomas Wood, to his feet to complain about the considerable tax burden this would place on the ratepayers in

³⁴Ward, Chartism, pp. 126-127.

³⁵Hansard, Third Series, vol. 49, Tuesday, July 9, 1839, pp. 85-86.

³⁶Ibid., pp. 86-88.

the metropolitan areas.³⁷ Wood had won this seat in the 1837 general election with a majority of only 202 over Joseph Hume, the Chartist Radical, who had represented the area since 1832. Wood probably needed to make an impression on the constituents who had voted for him to prove that he had their financial interests at heart. Since he was returned unopposed in the 1841 general election this plea for cheap but efficient government may not have gone unnoticed.

During debate on the Metropolitan Police Bill on July 10, 1839, Joseph Hume, the Chartist Radical Member for Kilkenny, asked the Home Secretary if he planned to order the Metropolitan police to wherever they were required. If this were his plan Home suggested that their expenses should be made the subject of an annual vote - a proposal very quickly rejected by the Government.³⁸

Hume was followed by another Chartist Radical, Thomas Slingsby Duncombe, who was critical of the conduct of the police during the Bull Ring riots of July 8. Duncombe quoted from an unnamed newspaper which claimed that there was no sign of rioting until the police appeared, and that whenever they saw people congregating they "commenced an indiscriminate attack" However, this account was dismissed as inaccurate by the Home Secretary.³⁹

³⁷Ibid., p. 88. ³⁸Ibid., p. 108.

³⁹Ibid., pp. 109-110.

Although the Chartists received little support in Parliament, Thomas Duncombe along with his fellow Chartist Radical Member for Finsbury, Thomas Wakley, and Oldham's John Fielden always made it clear that they considered that it was their responsibility to represent the views of the working classes as well as their own constituents.⁴⁰

On Friday, July 12, 1839 Thomas Attwood rose to bring forward his motion that a Committee of the House should consider the National Petition. He believed in universal suffrage and the Chartists' political demands; he felt that the condition of the working classes would never improve until the politicians were made responsible to the whole population, and he believed that a good monetary policy would bring prosperity to all.⁴¹ He had, however, been put in a difficult position by the ascendancy of the physical force group at the Chartist Convention. In spite of his misgivings he explained the terms of the Petition to the House, and urged the Members to consider it, for the workers were so roused that any local outbreak might spread and become serious. He made his own position very clear, however, when he stated that, "... I wash my hands of any talk of physical force or arms."⁴²

⁴⁰Dorothy Thompson, The Early Chartists, London: The MacMillan Press Ltd., 1971.

⁴¹G.D.H. Cole, Chartist Portraits, London: MacMillan & Co. Ltd., 1941, pp. 106-107.

⁴²Hansard, Third Series, vol. 49, Friday, July 12, 1839, pp. 222-235.

Fielden seconded the motion, and his speech reflected his interest in reform of the Poor Law and factory conditions. He noted that the Chartist Petition claimed that manufacturers were on the verge of bankruptcy and that women were starving. He substantiated that claim by reference to the cotton manufacturing districts of Lancashire where consumption was down by two-thirds since the previous year. He criticized the Reform Bill, the lack of relief for the Irish and the handloom weavers, and the use of £20,000 to procure the emancipation of Blacks while people in British manufacturing districts lived in worse conditions.⁴³

After the Home Secretary spoke, accusing the promoters of the Petition of inciting the people, Benjamin Disraeli, the Conservative M.P. for Maidstone rose to say that "... however much he disapproved of the Charter he sympathized with the Chartists." He agreed with Lord John Russell's statement that merely enacting a law would not bring prosperity and it was indeed a fallacy to presume that granting a political right would ensure social happiness. However, he believed that the post-1832 electorate had assaulted the civil rights of the people, and that the assault was "... in some degree of an economical and in some degree certainly of a political character."⁴⁴ The old constitution had invested the few with political rights on condition that they should guard the civil rights of the many. The Reform

⁴³ Ibid., pp. 235-236. ⁴⁴ Ibid., pp. 246-247.

Bill had transferred that power to a new group, the middle class, but they had not taken over the social duties of the aristocracy. The middle classes demanded only a cheap, centralized form of government, and cared little for the civil rights of the unrepresented. Disraeli disapproved of the Charter and its fallacious argument that social ills would be cured with the granting of political rights, but he sympathized with the Chartists and warned the Liberal ministry that if the present system of cheap, centralized government were to be continued there might be a truly revolutionary rising in which the monarchy might be threatened.⁴⁵

Joseph Hume, the Kilkenny Chartist Radical, then defended his notion of a Charter modelled on moderate, rational principles. He considered that Disraeli's taunting of the Whig ministry was unjustified, for if the Whigs had done little for the unrepresented the Opposition had done still less. Having rapped the knuckles of the Conservatives he turned his attack upon the Whigs, who were responsible for carrying the Reform Bill of 1832, which had so disappointed the people. Hume stated that taxation and representation should go hand in hand, and that no man could consider himself free unless he had a voice in the election of those who were to make the laws under which he lived. Hume acted as a teller for the ayes when the House divided, for he believed

⁴⁵Ibid., pp. 247-252.

that if the Petition were rejected the country would be in danger, but if there were universal male suffrage, "... men would be sent to the House, anxious to correct abuses, ... to control unnecessary expenses and to give industry its due reward."⁴⁶

Robert Aglionby Slaney, who had entered the Commons in 1826 as the Liberal Member for Shrewsbury, and had always shown a considerable interest in the matter of social reform, stated that he would not support this motion. The Petition demanded too great an alteration in the constitution, which he did not think would forward the Chartist cause, and would have an adverse effect on the country's trade, for it would "... shake the confidence of capitalists in the stability of things."⁴⁷

Daniel O'Connell, the Dublin Repeal M.P., who, with his followers, was pledged to procure a repeal of the Act of Union, attacked the violence of the physical force advocates which had lost radical support. He made several good points in his criticism of the detail of the Petition. He stated that too frequent elections would cause them to become matters of indifference, and he opposed the Chartist version of universal suffrage, which he rightly pointed out was not universal, for it did not include women, apprentices or servants. He agreed that taxation and representation should go hand in hand, and he reminded the House that under the

⁴⁶Ibid., pp. 252-258. ⁴⁷Ibid., pp. 258-259.

present system only 19 percent of the English population and 4 percent of the Irish population were enfranchised.

O'Connell believed that this system would have been changed had the Chartists not got involved with physical force, and thus scared away the middle classes and "... the sober and quiet members of society." Although he opposed violence he planned to support the motion, because he believed that Parliament should represent the entire nation.⁴⁸

The subsequent debate was, on the whole lacklustre, and indeed the House showed little interest in the subject. The fear of physical force made many come down on the side of law and order. This was typical of many Parliamentarians who otherwise felt some sympathy for the Chartist cause. It would seem that O'Connell's attack on the physical force Chartists was justified.

General W.A. Johnson, the Radical Member for Oldham, suggested that if the masses were not to be given representation they should be exempted from taxation. He aired his own pet grievance by stating that the National Debt was at the root of all the country's troubles, but he did not support the motion with his vote.⁴⁹ The Hon. Charles Pelham Villiers, the Radical Member for Wolverhampton, objected to Johnson raising the question of the National Debt in relation to the Petition. Villiers was one of the "Philosophic Radicals" in Parliament, men who considered themselves both philosophers

⁴⁸ Ibid., pp. 258-263.

⁴⁹ Ibid., pp. 264-265.

and politicians. They drew on the Benthamite utilitarian philosophy to defend democratic government, which was to be achieved by the realignment of parties and the creation of a new Radical party.⁵⁰ Johnson assured the House that he had not implied any dishonest dealing with the public debt, simply that it needed to be "grappled" with. Villiers seized on this word as suggesting use of force. He made it clear that he would not be associated with those who " . . . would disobey the law or invade the rights of property." He did, nevertheless, vote for the motion.⁵¹

James Oswald, the Liberal Member for Glasgow, stated that he would vote against the motion, because if the House went into committee it would raise the people's hopes, and they would probably be disappointed at the outcome.⁵² Henry Warburton, the Radical who represented Bridport, disagreed with this attitude. Warburton was also one of the "Philosophic Radicals" in the House. He admitted that he could not support all the points of the Charter, but he planned to vote for the motion because he believed that good representation was conducive to good government. If he thought that extending the suffrage would lead to the cancellation of the National

⁵⁰Joseph Hamburger, Intellectuals in Politics, John Stuart Mill and the Philosophical Radicals, New Haven: Yale University Press, 1965, p. 2.

⁵¹Hansard, Third Series, vol. 49, Friday, July 12, 1839, pp. 265-267.

⁵²Ibid., p. 267.

Debt; however, he would resist it, because many small fund-holders wanted to retain it, and did not want the present currency arrangements tampered with.⁵³

Thomas Wakley, the Chartist Radical Member for Finsbury, who had, in 1837 forced Lord John Russell to take the position on reform which earned him the name "Finality Jack," then rose to speak. In 1837 he had moved three amendments to the Address at the opening of the first Parliament of Victoria's reign to consider the extension of the suffrage, the ballot and the duration of parliaments.⁵⁴ On July 12, 1839, he warned that if the House would not consider the Chartist Petition seriously then he would urge the people to form associations to discuss their grievances, and to try to win the goodwill of the middle classes so that they could write to attain their rights.⁵⁵

Fox Maule, Liberal Member for Elgin, and a junior minister, assured the House that the majority of Scots were opposed to the Charter, for they believed in the rights of property, the happiness of the greatest number and good order, all of which he felt the Chartists were trying to subvert.⁵⁶

Then Sir Thomas Dyke Acland, followed by his fellow Conservative Member for South Devonshire, Sir John B. Yarde

⁵³Ibid., p. 267.

⁵⁴Hamburger, p. 208.

⁵⁵Hansard, Third Series, vol. 49, pp. 268-271.

⁵⁶Ibid., pp. 271-272.

Buller, pointed out that rural districts were not badly off. Although the minimum wage for agricultural labourers was only seven shillings a week most were able to earn between ten and fifteen shillings with the perquisites which went with their jobs, and they were not in such distress as the Chartist Petition implied.⁵⁷ Both of these members were solid country gentlemen, who personified the stereotype of what Gash calls "the party of landed interest and Protection."⁵⁸

Joshua Scholefield, Attwood's fellow M.P. for Birmingham, and an ally in his desire for class collaboration and currency reform, stated that the Chartists only wanted to be treated justly, and to be asked to pay only a fair share of taxes. Attwood then wound up a generally unremarkable debate, and further consideration of the Petition was rejected by an unenthusiastic House by 235 votes to 46.⁵⁹

Of the 153 Liberals (133 were absent) who cast a vote, 30.1 percent voted for the motion and 69.9 percent against it. The Conservatives, however, were unanimous in their opposition to the motion. According to Close, a total of 567 Members, excluding the Speaker, sat throughout the 1837 Parliament but only 281 Members, 49.5 percent, voted in this division. According to their voting patterns 274 were

⁵⁷Ibid., pp. 272-273.

⁵⁸Gash, p. 129.

⁵⁹Hansard, Third Series, vol. 49, pp. 273-277.

classified by him as Conservatives, 286 as Liberal supporters, and only 7 as being unaligned clearly with any one party.⁶⁰

It is necessary here to remember that the parties of the 1830's did not have the formal structure of today's political parties. As Aydelotte points out they were "parliamentary groupings rather than national organizations, and even in Parliament they were rudimentary in structure, undisciplined, loosely organized and controlled, and frequently unable to provide the support needed for firm government."⁶¹ Nevertheless the small percentage of M.P.'s who voted suggests that the Chartist Petition was seen as a fairly minor matter by both sides of the House, and Members like Sibthorp and Dungannon, who had earlier attacked the Government on the law and order issue, did not vote.

Those Convention delegates who remained had to decide upon what sanctions to take, and they voted for a "sacred month" of strikes to begin on August 12, but they were seriously divided on this subject. While the Convention was engaged in debate, a serious riot developed in Birmingham. There, on July 15, a demonstration to welcome Collins and Lovett, out on bail from Warwick Gaol, got out of hand, and the participants went on a spree of destruction. The police would not intervene without express orders from the Mayor

⁶⁰David Close, "The Formation of the Two-Party Alignment in the House of Commons between 1832 and 1841," English Historical Review 84 (1969), p. 275.

⁶¹William O. Aydelotte, "Parties and Issues in Early Victorian England," The Journal of British Studies, 5 (1966), p. 102.

and his magistrates, so for more than an hour the rioters were left undisturbed.

F.C. Mather suggests that the Whig Ministry was reluctant to seek new legislation, and would only appeal to Parliament for extended powers when the situation became crucial. If they attempted to restrict the rights of citizens they would arouse those Members who felt strongly about civil rights, and if they attempted to improve the efficiency of the forces of law and order they would arouse those who saw this as a threat to establish a permanent national force. It would not only be radicals who would oppose the Government in debate; it would also be the more moderate opposition. They would not vote against the proposed measures, but they would take the opportunity to criticize and harass the administration.⁶² This proved to be the case with the 1839 Police Bills introduced by the Whigs. With the exception of a few eccentrics like Disraeli, the Conservatives supported the Whig Ministry, although they seized upon the opportunity to condemn the Melbourne Ministry for bringing up the measures to improve the police force so late in the session.

On July 17 the debate began. William MacKinnon, the Conservative M.P. for Lymington, asked the Home Secretary for information about the riots, and demanded to know if the Government intended to take action against the Birmingham Council because their apathy had allowed the riots to continue

⁶² Mather, pp. 31-32.

for some time.⁶³ Henry Goulburn, Conservative Member for Cambridge University, then rose to state that he felt that the Birmingham workers had been led astray, and that by their forbearance the Government had encouraged the guilty to compromise the innocent.⁶⁴

Joshua Scholefield, Chartist Radical M.P. for Birmingham, and father of the Mayor of that city, defended his son's actions. The riot, he said, was unexpected, and the magistrates did not want the police to act until they were present to oversee their actions because there had been charges of police brutality on July 4. Scholefield tried to shift the blame from the political reformers, and insinuated that this latest outbreak was simply a looting expedition. To back up this claim he told the House that the house of a reformer had been plundered.⁶⁵

Then the Conservatives returned to the attack. The Member for Greenwich, Wolverley Attwood, told of a letter which he had received that very morning, stating that fresh outbreaks of violence were expected and that the people did not trust the magistrates to protect them. He questioned the Home Secretary about providing better protection in another emergency.⁶⁶ After further attacks by the Conservatives the

⁶³Hansard, Third Series, vol. 49, Wednesday, July 17, 1839, p. 408.

⁶⁴Ibid., p. 415. ⁶⁵Ibid., p. 416.

⁶⁶Ibid., pp. 417-418.

motion was agreed to bring the subject of the Birmingham riots under the consideration of the House.

On July 23, 1839, as the debate on the Birmingham Police Bill continued, Thomas Duncombe stated that the country was in a dangerous state of discontent and distress, yet the House had refused to consider the National Charter. The Liberal Ministry was now considering a grant of £10,000 to attempt to keep law and order in the town. He believed that in order to quiet the people, the Ministry would have to redress the people's grievances.⁶⁷ Disraeli then rose to suggest that before the House granted an advance of money for the Birmingham police it should investigate the causes of the trouble. He inferred that it was because there was a weak government in power.⁶⁸

John Leader, one of the Philosophic Radicals and the Member for Westminster, considered the request for money highly irregular, and believed that accounts of the Bull Ring riots had been exaggerated.⁶⁹ John Easthope, who sat as a Liberal for Leicester from 1837-1847, and had purchased the Morning Chronicle in 1834,⁷⁰ felt, however, that it was the duty of the Government to secure the tranquility of the country.⁷¹ Perhaps he felt obliged to defend the press against

⁶⁷Ibid., Tuesday, July 23, 1839, p. 692.

⁶⁸Ibid., p. 693. ⁶⁹Ibid.

⁷⁰Dictionary of National Biography, vol. 6, London: Oxford University Press, pp. 329-330.

⁷¹Hansard, Third Series, vol. 49, p. 693.

Leader's suggestion that accounts of the rioting had been overstated. After taking the opportunity to criticize the Liberal Ministry again, Peel too supported the Home Secretary on the grounds of law and order, but John Fielden, the Oldham Chartist Radical, maintained that the best way to quieten the people was to redress their grievances.⁷² When the House divided on the motion to go into committee to consider the question of providing money for the Birmingham police, it was passed by 144 to 3.⁷³ The Conservatives on the whole approved of the Liberal scheme to improve the means of enforcing the existing law by improving the police force.

Sir Robert Peel, after inquiring into the nature of the force to be established, again took the opportunity to lambast the Government for its inaction. He claimed that the Birmingham riots were due to the radical speeches, union meetings and suchlike which had occurred over the past few years, and which had built up an excitement which was bound to explode into action as more militant leaders took over. He criticized the Government for not having called the attention of the House to the unrest earlier, and implied that the Home Office was in possession of information which it did not choose to pass on to Parliament. Nevertheless, he gave his support to the motion because he supported the maintenance of law and order.⁷⁴

⁷²Ibid., p. 694. ⁷³Ibid. ⁷⁴Ibid., pp. 700-704.

Those who supported radical causes were frequently for law and order and the protection of property. Henry Ward, Sheffield's Chartist Radical M.P., hoped that this would be the beginning of a permanent police system in all large towns, and that the House would agree to the measure without division to show those who were acting unlawfully that the House would act to protect life and property.⁷⁵

Lord John Russell, in reply to Peel, claimed that there had been no reason for concern at the outset, and that the Birmingham agitation was not stirred up by the Chartists alone, but also by anti-Poor Law and factory reform reformers like Richard Oastler,⁷⁶ dubbed "The Factory King" by his contemporaries.⁷⁷ John Fielden disagreed with the Home Secretary's statement, and reiterated that the House could not afford to ignore the complaints of the poor, or there would be further trouble.⁷⁸ The Resolution before the House was agreed upon, and the Bill had its first reading.

On July 29 Lord John Russell moved the order of the day for going into committee on the Birmingham Police Bill, but Sir Robert Peel asked for an alteration to be made. He wished to have a salaried commissioner to superintend the Birmingham police for three years, because he did not trust the Liberal magistrates of Birmingham. He did all he could

⁷⁵Ibid., p. 704. ⁷⁶Ibid., pp. 704-706.

⁷⁷Cole, p. 80.

⁷⁸Hansard, Third Series, vol. 49, Tuesday, July 23, 1839, p. 707.

to discredit them, and the Whig Government which had nominated them to the bench. He accused the Clerk of the Peace, Edmonds, of having advocated the use of physical force and of having defended Chartist prisoners at Warwick Assizes. Peel stated that the town registrar was a known Chartist, and accused the Chartists of being a danger to the peace and good order of the country. Having thus stirred up the House he then left the Liberals to argue amongst themselves.⁷⁹

Scholefield defended the Birmingham Council, and countered with the allegation that there was a union of Chartists and Tories opposing the Mayor and corporation. He went so far as to suggest that the Chartists were in the pay of the Tories, though he offered no proof to support this allegation.⁸⁰

Scholefield was followed by his fellow M.P. for Birmingham, Attwood, who claimed that while the Birmingham Council was liberal and desirous of political reform it was not extreme. He suggested that there was a "hidden hand" at work, and inferred that men "not sincerely attached to the cause of the people, but mischievously and wickedly urging them on to acts of violence" in order to "injure and destroy the cause which they falsely professed to serve" had been active in Birmingham. Attwood implied that there had been a plot to make the people the "instruments of their own

⁷⁹ Ibid., Monday, July 29, 1839, pp. 938-947.

⁸⁰ Ibid., pp. 947-948.

destruction" and asked if it were the Russians or the Tories who had done this.⁸¹

This at once roused David Urquhart, an extravagant Turcophile and Russophobe. He had a thorough knowledge of the politics of Eastern Europe, and in 1835 had founded the Portfolio, a periodical devoted to diplomatic affairs.⁸² He feared that Chartism was being used as a Russian tool.⁸³ It is possible that he had interested Attwood in his beliefs. There certainly seems to have been some belief in a conspiracy theory, that a more powerful hand was manipulating the Chartists, thus negating the agency of the people.

Thomas Law Hodges, Liberal Member for Kent, disagreed with Attwood's assertion that nine-tenths of the rural population were rick-burners, and felt that this was a case of the few giving the many a bad name. He did not, however, quarrel with Attwood's statement that an equal percentage of urbanites were Chartists.⁸⁴

The Irish Radical, Daniel O'Connell, expressed his desire to see the Chartists treated fairly. He felt that the Lords in particular had been unjust, and described the working classes as a "slave class." He believed that with stronger leaders the Chartists could have been powerful, and

⁸¹Ibid., pp. 948-951.

⁸²Dictionary of National Biography, vol. 20, pp. 43-45.

⁸³Ward, pp. 135-136.

⁸⁴Hansard, Third Series, vol. 49, pp. 958-959.

that if it spread to Ireland the Chartist Movement could be very dangerous. O'Connell came out on the side of law and order, and hoped to see a government strong enough to put down the risings.⁸⁵

The Committee was postponed, and on August 2 the Home Secretary asked leave to withdraw the Birmingham Police Bill, and to introduce another.⁸⁶ He made no mention of the Chartists in his speech, but why should he, for on July 22 troops and police had attacked a Chartist meeting in Newcastle, and a widespread campaign against Chartism had begun. Local authorities arrested Chartists, and major trials in Lancashire and the Midlands resulted in the imprisonment of many of the leaders, as well as the rank and file. Chartism began to disintegrate.

Earlier in the day Leader, the Westminster Chartist Radical, had protested about the treatment of Lovett and Collins in Warwick Prison. Sir E. Wilmot, the Conservative Member for North Warwickshire, stated that these two Chartists were trying to rouse the workers against the Birmingham magistracy, and that they were using Mr. Leader for their own ends. Benjamin Hawes, the Liberal M.P. for Lambeth, in support of civil rights, stated that the regulations at the

⁸⁵Ibid., pp. 959-962.

⁸⁶Ibid., Friday, August 2, 1839, p. 1193.

gaol were illegally applied to the Chartist prisoners, who had not yet been brought to trial.⁸⁷

On August 16, 1839 the Lords began to debate the Birmingham Riots. The Conservative Lord Stanhope drew the attention of the House to a petition from the Birmingham Working Men's Association complaining about the behaviour of the Metropolitan police. Stanhope claimed to have interviewed an eye-witness, a Mr. Taylor, who stated that the people were unarmed, and that they were not obstructing the police. Mr. Taylor contended that it was only after the police drew their staves that the people found weapons and began to riot. Lord Stanhope did not explain how the people found weapons so conveniently to hand. He did claim that two policemen had admitted to Mr. Taylor that they were ashamed of their behaviour, and that Mr. Taylor believed that the actions of the police had created sympathy for the Chartists. The Petition was then tabled.⁸⁸

On Tuesday, August 20, Viscount Duncannon, a Whig minister, made a motion for going into Committee on the Bolton Police Bill in the Lords.⁸⁹ Lord Lyndhurst, a Conservative peer, took this opportunity to blame the Melbourne ministry for appointing a man with Chartist sympathies as mayor, and thus encouraging Chartists everywhere. This same man had

⁸⁷Ibid., pp. 1188-1192.

⁸⁸Ibid., vol. 50, Friday, August 16, 1839, pp. 362-364.

⁸⁹Ibid., p. 427.

forbidden the troops to act against the rioters, and he had called on his borough reeves to convene a public meeting to consider the propriety of proceeding in procession to join a group of Chartists, who were to assemble at Kendal Green near Manchester. The reeves refused, so the mayor and 1500 people met in a theatre and passed "several resolutions of an inflammatory nature." One of these resolutions, seconded by the Mayor of Bolton, approved the People's Charter. Then the 1500 proceeded to join the Kendal Green Chartist meeting. This gave Lord Lyndhurst a marvellous opportunity to criticize the Whig Ministry for encouraging Chartist sympathizers by appointing such a man as mayor.⁹⁰ He was supported by Wellington, who argued that men who violated the peace so blatantly should not be appointed by a government to maintain law and order.⁹¹ The Tory Duke of Richmond agreed, and demanded a nationwide inquiry, so that Chartist sympathizers who held positions of trust could be identified and dismissed.⁹²

On August 22 Lord Brougham presented a petition to the Lords from Vincent, Edwards and Dickinson, complaining about their treatment in Monmouth Gaol. They had been convicted of making speeches at a meeting called to discuss the People's Charter. They believed, as did Lord Brougham, that their constitutional rights gave them the privilege of meeting

⁹⁰Ibid., pp. 427-431. ⁹¹Ibid., p. 432.

⁹²Ibid., pp. 432-433.

for free discussion of political questions. This petition was tabled.⁹³

On the following day the situation in Bolton was again raised in the Lords. Duncannon for the Government stated that the Mayor of Bolton had declared that he had not involved himself in politics since his appointment to the magistracy, nor had he knowingly sworn any Chartists into office. The Conservative peer, Lord Lyndhurst, pointed out that the mayor did not claim that he had not attended any Chartist meetings, however.⁹⁴ An opportunity to criticize an appointee of the Whig Ministry was not to be missed.

On August 23 in the Commons, Joseph Hume, the Chartist Radical Member for Kilkenny, drew the attention of the House to the petition he had tabled on behalf of Henry Vincent and other Chartists incarcerated in Monmouth Gaol. He claimed that the rules for the treatment of political prisoners were not being adhered to. He was supported by O'Connell, who asked that there should be a legal definition of the term political prisoner.⁹⁵ Subjects near and dear to the hearts of nineteenth and twentieth century Irishmen alike!

Chartism gradually disintegrated in the summer of 1839, although there were some sporadic outbreaks of violence. With the return of more peaceful conditions in late August

⁹³Ibid., Thursday, August 22, 1839, pp. 483-484.

⁹⁴Ibid., Friday, August 23, 1839, pp. 493-495.

⁹⁵Ibid., pp. 582-584.

the Home Office became more lenient in its treatment of Chartists. F.C. Mather observes that the Home Office papers contain the draft of a letter to the Mayor of Stockport dated August 22, 1839, expressing the Home Secretary's wish that no proceedings should be taken against Chartists who came forward voluntarily and surrendered their arms.⁹⁶

In Edinburgh Sir John Campbell, the Whig Attorney-General, boasted that the Government had put down Chartism "without one drop of blood being spilled."⁹⁷ Unfortunately just a few days after this claim was published in the Tory organ, the Quarterly Review, the Newport Rising took place.

The rejection of the National Petition in July, the failure of the National strike in August, and the disintegration of the Chartist Convention angered the Monmouth workers, and according to David Williams there was evidence of the distribution of firearms in Glamorgan and in Monmouthshire.⁹⁸

On November 4, 1839 the Chartists, led by Frost, Williams and Jones, converged on the Westgate Hotel in Newport to demand the release of their local leaders. When someone in the crowd fired a shot twenty-eight soldiers

⁹⁶F.C. Mather, "The Government and the Chartists," Chartist Studies, ed. Asa Briggs, London: MacMillan and Co. Ltd., 1959, p. 383.

⁹⁷Quarterly Review, vol. LXV, p. 294.

⁹⁸David Williams, "Chartism in Wales," Chartist Studies, ed. Asa Briggs, London: MacMillan and Co. Ltd., 1959, p. 234.

hidden in the hotel fired back. Fourteen rioters were killed and about fifty wounded.⁹⁹

It was rumoured that a national revolution had been planned to follow this outbreak, but it is impossible to determine if there was any truth in this rumour, just as it is impossible to determine the truth of the rumour that 120,000 were to rise with the backing of a Russian fleet. Both seem highly improbable. Nevertheless, many people believed that there was a Chartist conspiracy, with a central committee located somewhere in London ready to arrange and co-ordinate a national rising.

The Newport Rising provoked a strong reaction from the Whig Ministry, and Lord Melbourne made it clear to Lord John Russell in a letter dated November 6, 1839, that he believed that the co-ordination and secrecy of the rising made it more serious than any of the meetings that had gone before.¹⁰⁰

Parliament was prorogued at the end of August 1839, and did not sit again until January 16, 1840, so that there were no comments in the House by the parliamentarians. There had been none of the traditional Whig restraint in the treatment of the leaders of the rising, and on January 13, Frost, Williams and Jones had been sentenced to death for high

⁹⁹Ward, Chartism, pp. 133-135.

¹⁰⁰Mather, "The Government and the Chartists," Chartist Studies, pp. 383-384.

treason, and had it not been for the intervention of the Lord Chief Justice on a technicality, they might well have been hanged.

Chartist petitions for the Newport "martyrs" were organized early in 1840 by conventions at Manchester and Nottingham. Most delegates favoured appeals for their release rather than a resort to physical force. Chartism needed to change its tactics.

In October 1839 Melbourne reconstructed his ministry. Lord John Russell moved to the colonial office, and the Marquess of Normanby changed places with him. Lord John had brought the country through the first Chartist crisis without asking for special powers. It was, as his biographer John Prest says, an achievement of which he was "justifiably proud."¹⁰¹

On January 23, 1840, Lord Brougham presented a petition to the Lords from two Chartists serving twelve-month sentences in Chester Castle for the use of inflammatory language. They claimed that they had been wrongly convicted because the witnesses for the prosecution had their statements read to the court and no cross-examination was allowed, but when the prisoners gave their testimony they were informed that it might be used in evidence against them. The new Whig Home Secretary, the Marquess of Normanby, agreed to make

¹⁰¹ John Prest, Lord John Russell, London: The MacMillan Press Ltd., 1972, p. 149.

further inquiries, although he believed that the magistrates had been justified in their actions.¹⁰²

Lord Brougham was also instrumental in bringing the matter of the Newport Rising before the Lords, when he presented a petition for the release of the leaders on February 3, 1840 on the grounds that the Solicitor for the Treasury had not served the list of witnesses at the same time as the indictment. On this legal technicality there could have been an objection which might have helped the accused.¹⁰³

The Home Secretary admitted the error, but indicated that those conducting the case believed that "the objection could be of no force or weight." He then read to the peers a letter from Lord Chief Justice Tindal, who claimed that the judges deemed the conviction right, and that if a difference of opinion amongst the trial judges had not occurred the prisoners could well have been executed instead of being transported.¹⁰⁴

Lord Wynford supported the Home Secretary, and said that if the prisoners were pardoned it would encourage traitors and Chartism would prevail.¹⁰⁵ Lord Cottenham, the

¹⁰²Hansard, Third Series, vol. 51, Thursday, January 23, 1840, p. 508.

¹⁰³Ibid., Monday, February 3, 1840, pp. 1080-1083.

¹⁰⁴Ibid., pp. 1087-1092.

¹⁰⁵Ibid., p. 1092.

Whig Lord Chancellor, also supported Normanby's decision,¹⁰⁶ but the indefatigable Lord Brougham reiterated that two of the three trial judges had been in favour of the objection, and if the point had been decided at the time of the trial, the prisoners might have been acquitted.¹⁰⁷ The petition was then tabled.

Here we see a weak government, lacking the authority to deal boldly with a crisis, acting in a restrained manner, because they were frightened of being attacked by a strong opposition, whose attack could be politically dangerous. The attack was continued by Lord Brougham. On February 4, he presented a petition from Frost, Williams and Jones complaining about the way their case had been conducted, and asking the Lords to intervene on their behalf.¹⁰⁸

On the very same day, during a debate in the Lords on Socialism, which had arisen because of an objection on religious grounds to Robert Owen's presentation at court, the Bishop of Exeter accused the Socialists of irreligion and immorality. He was fearful of the influence that the vast distribution of Socialist tracts was having in the country, and also claimed the Socialists "embodied amongst their number many Chartists."¹⁰⁹ It seems likely that public discussions between both social and political reformers was a

¹⁰⁶Ibid., p. 1094. ¹⁰⁷Ibid., p. 1095.

¹⁰⁸Ibid., Tuesday, February 4, 1840, pp. 1159-1160.

¹⁰⁹Ibid., p. 1186.

common occurrence in many industrial towns, and probably some Socialist beliefs appealed to some Chartists. Jones claims that "the unequal division of Britain's wealth" and the possibility "of creating a new world through education" was part of the Chartist consciousness.¹¹⁰

The Bishop of Exeter quoted from the London and Westminster Review of April 1839, that Owenism "is at present the actual creed of a great portion of the working classes."¹¹¹ He then gave the following information provided by a Midlands clergyman:

It was a common thing for Chartists and Socialists to meet in the same rooms, and the leaders of the one body frequently assisted the leaders of the other on public occasions. At the Socialist Institution, Birmingham, the female Chartists meet every Monday evening and the male Chartists every Tuesday evening. At Bradford the Chartist leader, Barker is also the adopted advocate of Socialism. . . . The Socialist newspaper and the "Northern Star," the Chartist paper, are both printed at the same place, by Hobson, Leeds. At Dudley, they frequently used the same room as the Chartists, the bodies being nearly co-extensive.¹¹²

Certainly Chartists and Socialists must have shared many ideals, especially their interest in education and probably many people chose to belong to both groups. "Isaac Ironsides, teacher, John Goodwyn Barnby, poet, and 'communist', and Thomas Livesey, Chartist leader and treasurer of the

¹¹⁰David Jones, Chartism and the Chartists, London: Penguin Books Ltd., 1975, p. 36.

¹¹¹Hansard, Third Series, vol. 51, p. 1186.

¹¹²Ibid., p. 1188.

Rockdale Owenite Institution,"¹¹³ were three who chose to do so. There were, however, differences of emphasis and methods. In the period 1838-1841 there was a spirit of class warfare, of growing anti-middle-class feeling,¹¹⁴ but many Chartists were unable to accept Owen's views on religion and the family. Some felt that by his rejection of political action and physical force Owen was playing into the hands of the upper classes. The link had been made, however, and for many parliamentarians this was a strike against the Chartists.

On February 4, 1840, Robert A. Slaney, the Liberal Member for Shrewsbury, addressed the Commons on the long-standing causes of discontent among the working classes. There were "... the monopolies in the manufactures of the country and the discovery of new machinery - the effect of which was to deprive many persons of work," and there was the movement of people to urban areas where no provision had been made by the Government for health care, good housing, religious instruction, education or protection of the work force in times of fluctuation in commerce.

To illustrate the poor social conditions which were leading to unrest, Slaney quoted statistics from Liverpool in 1839, when 7860 cellars were inhabited day and night by 39,000 people, that is by one-fifth of the working class of

¹¹³Jones, p. 37.

¹¹⁴B. Harrison and P. Hollis, "Chartism, Liberalism and the Life of Robert Lowery," English Historical Review, LXXXII, 1967, pp. 503-535.

the city. He quoted similar statistics for other industrial centres, and pointed out the rise in the crime rate as well as the high infant mortality in these areas. He therefore moved that a select committee should be appointed to inquire into the causes of working class discontent with a view to devising remedies.¹¹⁵ Mr. W. Smith O'Brien, Liberal Member for Limerick, seconded the motion, because he wished to show the ordinary people that Parliament was not indifferent to their plight.¹¹⁶ The Liberal Member for Durham, Hedworth Lambton, felt that the motion was too indefinite, and that the workers had been deceived by the writers of articles and pamphlets.¹¹⁷ Joseph Hume, Kilkenny's M.P. held that the Government should have brought up the subject, and felt that any inquiry should include an extension of the franchise and a review of the Corn Laws. If the Government were more favourable to the Chartist cause he believed it would "increase the peace and contentedness of the people," for their principles were sound.¹¹⁸

At this time Chartism needed a new image, and eventually a National Charter Association of Great Britain was formed on July 20, 1840. It resolved to federate local "classes," "wards" and "councils," to levy a penny per week subscription; to move Chartist motions at political meetings;

¹¹⁵ Hansard, Third Series, vol. 50, pp. 1222-1234.

¹¹⁶ Ibid., p. 1234. ¹¹⁷ Ibid. ¹¹⁸ Ibid.

to encourage Temperance, and to support Chartist candidates at elections.¹¹⁹

From a promising beginning Chartism had descended into a somewhat despondent valley. The original vision of change leading to an egalitarian society had degenerated into a series of complaints against the status quo. Parliamentarians, as can be seen in the small numbers who cast their votes on questions related to Chartism, became disinterested except for the Chartist Radicals and a few eccentrics. There was no real threat to the status quo, for the Chartists offered no viable alternative, only a few changes to the existing system. Their complaints and suggested alterations to society could be ignored, ridiculed or simply absorbed by society. The Chartist Movement struck no fear into the hearts of the parliamentarians. It was a nuisance and a disruption supported by a few cranks. Its diversity of aims and outlooks made any effective co-operation in significant action impossible. Society was not threatened, only irritated.

¹¹⁹Ward, pp. 141-142.

Chapter 3

THE SECOND PEAK 1840-1842

The Chartist movement began to revive in the spring of 1840, but it was a changed movement. In its formative years Chartism had been, as Mather so succinctly puts it, "cradled in a broader radical tradition,"¹ when upper and middle-class radicals joined Chartist societies and shared Chartist platforms with working-class speakers. At this time of revival, however, there was a refusal on the part of the working classes to co-operate with the middle classes, and it was in this period that Chartist attacks on the Anti-Corn Law meetings took place. What happened in the late 1830's and early 1840's to convert working class consciousness into "widespread repudiation of contact with middle class reformers?"² Basically, it was the trade depression and the high price of food which made class feelings very bitter. Also, many of the middle class, in their roles as magistrates and special constables, had helped to put down the earlier Chartist risings.

¹F.C. Mather, Chartism, London: The Historical Association, 1965, p. 20.

²ibid., p. 2.

There was now an organization designed to educate the rank and file, and to keep them together, whereas before there had been only the annual national conventions. As Asa Briggs claims, "Chartism never completely disappeared even in its darkest hours."³ There was now a real attempt to make the working people of England feel that they were unified in an attempt to bring about social improvement.

Although the Chartist revival began in the spring of 1840 the only references to the movement in Parliament concerned the men who had been imprisoned as a result of the Birmingham and Newport Riots. The Chartist Radicals and their supporters attempted to enlist the support of other Liberals and Conservatives who were liberally inclined. On April 14, 1840 Henry Warburton, a Philosophical Radical, and Member for Bridport, made a motion for the mitigation of the sentence imposed on Lovett and Collins for seditious libel after the Birmingham Riots. He blamed the current legislation which did not differentiate political prisoners from common felons.⁴ The motion was seconded by Sergeant Talfourd, the Liberal M.P. for Reading who maintained that men with potential, like Vincent, convicted after the Newport Rising,

³Asa Briggs, "The Local Background of Chartism," Chartist Studies, ed. Asa Briggs, London: MacMillan and Co. Ltd., 1959, p. 28.

⁴Hansard, Third Series, vol. 53, Tuesday, April 14, 1840, pp. 1103-1107.

should not be placed in a regular gaol where they might make dangerous associations.⁵

Elgin, Undersecretary for the Home Department, was forced to agree that the Prisons' Act did not clearly delineate how persons convicted of seditious libel should be treated. The country had been in a dangerous and excitable state because of people making inflammatory speeches at that time, and he regarded Vincent as especially dangerous because of his attacks on the constitution in the Western Vindicator, a weekly publication very popular with western and Welsh Chartists.⁶

Hume, the Kilkenny Chartist Radical, objected to allegations being made against the Western Vindicator in the House when no judicial or criminal charges had been brought against it. He also claimed that the working classes truly believed that they had been treated more harshly than others of a "higher station" might have been.⁷ Duncombe then pointed out that Lovett and Collins, men of good repute, had been convicted for publishing what had frequently been said in the Commons, that the employment of London policemen was the cause of the Birmingham rioting. They had, therefore, called upon the people to resist such actions. Fox Maule, for the Government, denied that the presence of the London police had been the reason for the eruption of the Bull Ring Riots, and to

⁵Ibid., pp. 1109-1110. ⁶Ibid., pp. 1111-1112.

⁷Ibid., p. 1113.

prove his point he reminded the House that a police inspector has been tried for his conduct during the riots and had been acquitted.⁸

Viscount Sandom, the Conservative Member for Liverpool, expressed his belief that men such as these should have their sentences mitigated because they were not degraded criminals, even though their writings were mischievous.⁹ Another Conservative, Sir Eardley J. Wilmot, the Member for the Northern division of Warwickshire, stated that "misdemeanours of words should be treated differently from misdemeanours of deed," although in this case the Birmingham magistrates had simply applied the law as it stood.¹⁰

Radicals and Conservatives alike kept up the pressure on the Government by means of further petitions. On May 27, 1840 Duncombe presented a petition from a large Chartist meeting held at Bridworth, Yorkshire, protesting against the treatment of Feargus O'Connor. He asked if the Government had issued any directive about the treatment of Chartists, and if this were so, why O'Connor had been treated so severely.¹¹ The Under-Secretary of the Home Office took this opportunity to correct the impression that the Government had issued any orders as to the way O'Connor's sentence should be put into effect.¹²

⁸Ibid., p. 1114. ⁹Ibid., p. 1115. ¹⁰Ibid.

¹¹Ibid., vol. 54, Wednesday, May 27, 1840, pp. 647-649.

¹²Ibid., p. 649.

On June 2, 1840 Sergeant Talfourd presented petitions on behalf of O'Connor and Vincent.¹³ This caused Mr. Williams Addams Williams, the Liberal Member for Monmouthshire and a local magistrate, to respond by stating that he considered Vincent to be the cause of all the "disastrous events which had occurred in the area, for by his inflammatory speeches and articles he had aroused the people."¹⁴ Fox Maule pointed out that when Vincent was first imprisoned he was sent to Monmouth Jail, where he was allowed to have writing materials, but as he used them to continue supplying the Western Vindicator with articles he was moved to Millbank and lost these privileges.¹⁵

After a squabble involving Hume and Lord Granville Somerset, the Conservative M.P. for Monmouthshire, about whether or not Vincent had contributed articles to this publication since his imprisonment,¹⁶ Duncombe tried to bring the House back to the consideration of the complaint that the law had been unfairly administered. The Liberal M.P. for Cocker mouth, Henry Aglionby, pointed out that sympathy was being created for Vincent by such harsh treatment, and this made him more dangerous than his writings had done.¹⁷ The Chartists were certainly succeeding in drawing attention to their cause with their petitions, which could only be presented by Members of Parliament.

¹³Ibid., p. 895. ¹⁴Ibid., pp. 899-900.

¹⁵Ibid., p. 900. ¹⁶Ibid., p. 902. ¹⁷Ibid., p. 906.

After the motion to present a petition to the Queen about Vincent's sentence was withdrawn, another was introduced to have O'Connor transferred, and finally the Member for Salford presented a petition from his constituents complaining about O'Connor's treatment.¹⁸ All motions were ultimately withdrawn as both Liberals and Radicals wanted to show their opposition in debate, but not to embarrass the Government seriously. This campaign was continued in the Lords where three petitions were presented between June 4 and June 22, 1840, two by Lord Brougham and one by Lord Denman. All three complained of O'Connor's treatment, and implied that the Government was anti-Chartist.¹⁹ The petitions were tabled, but generated little debate.

The Earl of Warwick had complained to the Home Office in a letter dated January 9, 1839, about a number of boroughs in his county with magistracies composed of radicals alone.²⁰ A year after the Birmingham Riots he demanded in the Lords that reports and letters pertaining to the uprising should be made available to the House. The Earl reminded the Lords of the property which had been destroyed. He claimed that the lives as well as the property of people who lived in the area

¹⁸ Ibid., pp. 906-908.

¹⁹ Hansard, Third Series, vol. 54, Thursday, June 4, Friday, June 5, and Monday, June 22, 1840, p. 917, p. 953, p. 1365.

²⁰ Mather, p. 60.

had been left at the mercy of "an organized mob," although the magistrates had been informed of what was happening.²¹

The Marquess of Normanby, for the Government, pointed out that the reports had been ready for some time, but had never been requested. He regretted the Earl of Warwick's decision to resurrect the subject at a time when the angry feelings were subsiding, as it might revive these feelings. He assured the House that all proper precautions had been taken.²² With the Government's position becoming steadily weaker, and Aberdeen having announced that "A course of active hostility to the government" had been undertaken,²³ the Conservatives continued to harry the Government over its inability to maintain law and order.

Wellington reminded Normanby that although the magistrates had prior notice of the meeting, they failed to have two magistrates in attendance. As a result the police had no authority to act when the situation became volatile.²⁴ Warwick supported this statement, and claimed that had the wind not died down the whole town could have been destroyed by fire for the magistrates had made no preparations to deal

²¹Hansard, Third Series, vol. 55, Thursday, July 9, 1840, pp. 571-573.

²²Ibid., pp. 573-574.

²³Philip Ziegler, Melbourne, A Biography of William Lamb, 2nd Viscount Melbourne, New York: Alfred A. Knopf, Inc., 1976, p. 304.

²⁴Hansard, Third Series, vol. 55, Thursday, July 9, 1840, p. 575.

with the situation.²⁵ Lord Lyndhurst supported them and pointed out that a meeting had been held to discuss whether the gathering should be dispersed, and the military was in readiness to act if called upon. He informed the Lords that a Birmingham bookseller had informed the mayor that there was to be a meeting of Chartists, and that the Chartists had been "advised by their leaders to come prepared for the police." Although the magistrates received this information on the day prior to the riots, no preparations were made, and he considered this a gross dereliction of duty.²⁶

On July 16 the Liberal and Radical M.P.'s who believed that the Government should be responsible for "absorbing the conflicts and tensions generated by economic and social development,"²⁷ continued to harass the Government over the treatment of political prisoners. The Whigs were attacked not only by the Conservatives but also by the more liberal members of the Liberal Party. Henry Aglionby, the Liberal Member for Cockermouth, moved that copies of any reports or papers pertaining to the treatment of Feargus O'Connor at York Castle should be made available to the House.²⁸ Thomas

²⁵Ibid.

²⁶Hansard, Third Series, vol. 55, Thursday, July 9, 1840, p. 575.

²⁷William C. Lubenow, The Politics of Government Growth, Newton Abbot: David and Charles, 1971, p. 180.

²⁸Hansard, Third Series, vol. 55, Thursday, July 16, 1840, p. 771.

Wakley, the Chartist Radical Member for Salford, seconded the motion, and took the opportunity to note that, "Nearly three hundred persons were now confined in prison for political offences - that was for merely expressing their feelings in strong language."²⁹

Mr. Fox Maule replied for the Government, and refused to assent to the motion because O'Connor had received a fair trial, and the jury had believed that what he wrote was "calculated to stir up and inflame the minds of the people." He had received verbal reports from a Mr. Crawford, who had been sent on behalf of the Home Office to inquire into the charges. Crawford reported that O'Connor was being well treated, and that he was in good health.³⁰ Joseph Hume, the Chartist Radical M.P. for Kilkenny, was quick to retort that it was strange that a public officer sent to institute a Government inquiry should present only a verbal report.³¹

The House, as was usual when Chartist matters were being discussed, was thinly attended. This thin Commons divided on the motion: ayes - 12; noes - 19; majority - 7. As there was not a sufficient number of Members present to constitute a House the Speaker left the Chair, and the division went for nothing. The noes were: Conservatives - 3; Whigs - 13. One Repealer and two Radicals, who were not prepared to see the Government defeated on this issue, made

²⁹Ibid., p. 772. ³⁰Ibid., pp. 772-773.

³¹Ibid., p. 773.

up the group. The ayes were a heterogeneous group of Liberals (6), Irish Conservatives (2), Radicals (1), Peepers (1), and Chartist Radicals (2).

The subject was brought up again on August 5, 1840, when Aglionby, Radical M.P. for Finsbury, moved for an address to be presented to the Queen to direct that a commission should be set up to inquire into the treatment of O'Connor and of all prisoners gaoled for "uttering seditious words or for attending seditious meetings." For such men hard labour seemed an inappropriate sentence.³² Lord John Russell, the Colonial Secretary, replied for the Government. He had been at the Home Office at the time of the first Chartist risings, and was therefore well qualified to speak. At that time he had been very tolerant of Chartist activities; now, however, with the Government's position becoming steadily weaker, he was forced to come down strongly on the side of law and order. He expressed his sympathy for those who got excited about a cause and spoke unwisely, but he pointed out that O'Connor was the proprietor of a newspaper from which he made a profit. This newspaper launched constant attacks on the laws and institutions of the country, which endangered the peace. He believed that such a person should be dealt with severely, but not made to appear a martyr, for that might encourage others to follow his example. The Government would

³² Ibid., Wednesday, August 5, 1840, pp. 1287-1288.

not be deterred by petitions or motions from proceeding against those who encouraged others to break the law.³³

Thomas Duncombe stated that the House was ignorant of the number of people suffering in prison for political offences. He believed that there were more than two hundred at the time, and cited the case of William Martin, who had been sentenced to twelve months hard labour for sedition, and had been forced to work on a treadmill.³⁴ The motion was supported by the Chartist Radical, Thomas Wakley, who accused the Government of refusing to grant a commission of inquiry because it knew that many atrocities would be uncovered. He reiterated that the Government supported liberal principles when out of office, but condemned them when in office. Fox Maule, for the Government, maintained that gaols were well inspected, but agreed that he would not object to all prisons being controlled by a central board to eliminate the different systems of regulations which existed under the present system.³⁵

This debate was adjourned until the following day, when Lord John Russell moved the order of the day for a committee of ways and means. Aglionby, however, moved as an amendment to set up a commission to inquire into the treatment of political offenders. The House divided on the amendment: ayes - 42; noes - 11; majority - 31.³⁶ The noes were 8.

³³ *Ibid.*, pp. 1289-1294.

³⁴ *Ibid.*, pp. 1296-1299.

³⁵ *Ibid.*, pp. 1299-1304.

³⁶ *Ibid.*, Thursday, August 6, 1840, p. 1364.

Liberals, 2 Chartist Radicals and the same Repealer, Nicholas Aylward Vigor, a Protestant landowner and Liberal Member for County Carlow, who had voted with the ayes on the motion on July 16. These were the M.P.'s who frequently raised questions about the basic rights of citizens. Nothing more was heard of the matter in Parliament until Lord Brougham presented a petition to the House of Lords from the National Charter Association at Bloomsbury praying for the release of Frost, Williams and Jones, who had been convicted for their opinions, not for their acts.³⁷

Chartists used petitions as a peaceful method of bringing pressure to bear upon the Government, especially when the movement seemed to have lost much of its momentum, such as in the period between the presenting of the Charter, in 1839 and 1842. It was a legal method of drawing attention to their cause in Parliament, for petitions had to be presented by M.P.'s. According to Jones, the Chartists considered swamping Parliament with individual petitions, and Thomas Duncombe received 407 from Leicester alone. Few English and Welsh radicals took up the idea. Scotland, however, had its own "Petitioning Movement" which began in March 1840. There was such a trade in petitions that a London committee was set up to prepare them. The leaders of the Chartist movement saw that the political prisoners not only had good publicity value,

³⁷Ibid., vol. 56, Monday, February 22, 1841, p. 763.

but would help to keep the movement alive. The wives of these prisoners received weekly grants, or were helped to set up in business.³⁸ Mark Hovell saw Chartism making great progress during 1840-41, and becoming more efficient. He instanced the two million signatures gained for a petition for the release of Frost which Duncombe presented in May 1841.³⁹ Indeed, Chartism did reach a peak never to be reached again.

The Chartist Radicals and their supporters looked on the parliamentary process and, indeed, on the very composition of Parliament as being inappropriate to the needs of the working classes. This was a reflection on the social system of the time, all the more so because many parliamentarians seemed only too happy to see Chartists and their supporters locked away. This suggests that there was a pronounced class element in Parliament at this time.

The petition, presented by Duncombe on May 25, 1841 in the middle of a political crisis, was a huge document signed by 1,300,000 of the "industrious classes." "It was rolled on to the floor of the House like a mighty snowball," was the report in McDouall's Chartist and Republican Journal, no. 12.⁴⁰ The petition asked that the House should send an

³⁸David Jones, Chartism and the Chartists, London: Penguin Books Ltd., 1974, p. 84.

³⁹Mark Hovell, The Chartist Movement, Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1918, pp. 211-212.

⁴⁰Jones, p. 87.

address to the Queen begging that all political prisoners should be liberated, and that Frost, Williams and Jones, the leaders of the Newport Rising, should be granted a free pardon. The petition also pleaded that the House should adopt the principles of the Charter.⁴¹

The Liberal Government was in difficulties. In April John Walter, proprietor of the Times, had won the city of Nottingham, long a Liberal seat, with the help of the Radicals and the Chartists. The Conservatives were ready now to wage an all-out assault on the Government in Parliament.

The presentation of the petition brought Col. C.D.W. Sibthorp, Conservative M.P. for Lincoln, to his feet to complain that the prayer of the petition had not been read in its entirety, and, tongue in cheek, to state that he was anxious that the petitions of all classes of people should be considered by the House.⁴² Peel pointed out that since the petition had been tabled, the substance of the prayer could be learned, and since it was so large a petition, it would be difficult to unroll.⁴³ He wanted to make it clear that the Conservative Party was not behind Sibthorp in his jibing. Lord John Russell, the Whig Colonial Secretary, attacked Sibthorp for making a jest of the petition. By implication

⁴¹Hansard, Third Series, vol. 58, Tuesday, May 25, 1841, pp. 740-741.

⁴²Ibid., p. 741. ⁴³Ibid.

he suggested that the Conservatives in general were ridiculing the working classes.⁴⁴ Col. Sibthorp denied this, and received support from Sir Robert Harry Inglis, Conservative Member for Oxford University. The latter stated that any member might ask to have the prayer of a petition read in the regular manner without "intending to cast the slightest reflection on those who had signed it."⁴⁵

After the petition was received Duncombe accused Col. Sibthorp of ridiculing it, and then spoke of the allegations in the petitions concerning the especially harsh treatment meted out to Chartists. He stated that when a Chartist was found guilty of attending an illegal meeting there was "no hope or chance for escape."⁴⁶ He noted that of the 444 persons convicted of political offences subsequent to January 1, 1839 thirty-three remained in prison. He read to the House letters from Peter Hoey, who had been released from Wakefield Gaol and George Henry Smith, who had been released from Preston House of Correction, complaining about their treatment while imprisoned.⁴⁷ He pointed out that seditious libel was a matter of opinion only, and that those who had signed these petitions had come to look upon the prisoners as martyrs. He then moved that the address should be presented to the Queen.⁴⁸

⁴⁴Ibid., p. 742. ⁴⁵Ibid. ⁴⁶Ibid., p. 744.

⁴⁷Ibid., pp. 745-747. ⁴⁸Ibid., pp. 748-749.

Mr. Fox Maule, for the Government, assured him that the Ministry did not hold the petition in ridicule, although some Members did believe that the demands for political privileges were exaggerated and ought not to be granted. He doubted the expediency of presenting such an address to the Crown, and rejected most definitely the implication that Chartists were treated more harshly than other citizens.⁴⁹

The Repeal M.P. for Dublin, Mr. Daniel O'Connell, supported the motion as he claimed that the Government had achieved its aims because, "No Chartist was now breaking the Law," and at such a time mercy should be shown.⁵⁰ It was a strange statement to come from a man who had not attended a Leeds rally in January 1840 because he believed that O'Connor's followers would kill him.⁵¹ John Temple Leader, the Westminster Radical, agreed with this plea for mercy. He also spoke out for social justice for the working classes, who believed that there was one law for the rich and another for the poor. He too claimed that the Chartists were not agitating and that "there was no danger of outbreaks."⁵²

The Liberal M.P. for Falkirk, William Gillon, rose to state that in his opinion the House was not indifferent to the views of the people. He trusted much to the good sense of the Chartists and believed that they were beginning to see the

⁴⁹Ibid., pp. 749-753. ⁵⁰Ibid., p. 754.

⁵¹Ward, p. 146.

⁵²Hansard, Third Series, vol. 58, Tuesday, May 25, 1841, p. 754.

folly of their past conduct. He hoped that he would see no more of it, any more than of the "unnatural coalition that had lately taken place between the Chartists and the Tories."⁵³ He was referring to the recent by-election at Nottingham won by Walter for the Conservatives.

This link was again evident in the 1841 general election. There had always been a tradition of popular Toryism in the North, where some radicals, such as Oastler and Bernard, as well as some Northern M.P.'s tried to recapture the good feelings that had once existed between rich and poor when paternalism was the norm. The Poor Law controversy brought Conservatives and Radicals closer together in Wales and the North. The Morning Chronicle reported that in the 1841 election "Chartists, such as are voters, have almost to a man supported the Tories."⁵⁴ Since only a few Chartists were enfranchised I doubt that their support at the polls could have weighed the scales heavily in the Conservatives' favour. However, their fiery orators might have swayed some voters to support the upholders of paternalism. Such happenings did provide the Liberals with a weapon for a small attack upon the Conservatives, in face of the latter's determined assault.

In the continuing debate, the Chartist Radical, Hume, brought the House back to a consideration of the motion for

⁵³Ibid., pp. 755-756.

⁵⁴Jones, p. 122.

an address to the Queen requesting clemency for political prisoners, and adoption of the six points of the Charter.⁵⁵

Henry Warburton, the Bridport Liberal and supporter of social justice issues, spoke of the harsh treatment and long confinement of the Chartist prisoners.⁵⁶ Thomas Wakley, the

Salford Chartist Radical, drew Peel into the debate when he implied that the Conservative leader was deliberately evading a difficult subject.⁵⁷ Peel denied this, and stated that he

was opposed to establishing a precedent by the House making a recommendation to the Monarch. The Queen's advisors would not, he was sure, be influenced by a desire for popularity, but for the permanent interests of society.⁵⁸ One feels

that this was a deliberate and ironic implication that it was just what he expected the Whig ministers to do, as they knew that a general election was imminent and that their position was weak.

John Easthope, who sat for Leicester from 1837-1847 as a Radical, and who had purchased the Morning Chronicle in 1834, agreed with Peel on principle. However, he planned to vote for the motion because some of his constituents had presented their petition to the House in which they expressed their desire that one of those offenders should become a candidate to represent that town in Parliament,⁵⁹ and he wanted to see that his constituents' wishes were expressed

⁵⁵Ibid., p. 756. ⁵⁶Ibid. ⁵⁷Ibid., pp. 756-757.

⁵⁸Ibid., pp. 757-759. ⁵⁹Ibid., p. 759.

in the House. Actually, he did not vote for the motion, but he was re-elected in the June 29 election.⁶⁰

Sir De Lacy Evans, the Radical M.P. for Westminster, accused not only Peel, but also Fox Maule of defending their opposition to the motion on the basis of constitutional law when they should have been considering the wishes of more than a million unrepresented people.⁶¹ Sir Benjamin Hall, the Liberal representative for Marylebone and one-time Member for Monmouth, assured the House that he had never known the Monmouth area to be so tranquil. There was no agitation among the working people although wages had been reduced and the iron industry was in a depressed state. It was his opinion that the whole country was quiet: therefore the Government could afford to be merciful.⁶² Henry Aglionby, a Radical from Cocker mouth, saw no impropriety in the House letting its wishes be known to the Crown, and accused the House of failing in its duty to the Chartists. If Members had taken the trouble to attend some Chartist meetings and find out more about the movement, they would have shown more sympathy for its demands, and the public in turn would feel less disaffection for Parliament.⁶³ Melbourne's ministry

⁶⁰ Charles R. Dod, Electoral Facts 1832-1833, Impartially Stated, Brighton: Harvester Press, 1972, p. 177.

⁶¹ Hansard, Third Series, vol. 58, Tuesday, May 25, 1841, p. 760.

⁶² Ibid. ⁶³ Ibid., pp. 760-761.

was thus under attack from Chartist Radicals, Radicals, Liberals and Conservatives.

Viscount Sandon, the Conservative Member for Liverpool, a constituency with a large working class population, opposed the motion because he felt it dangerous for the House to interfere with the prerogative of the Crown.⁶⁴

Lord John Russell reiterated that petitions asking for mercy should be directed to the Crown, not the Commons, and Colonel Sibthorp again opposed the motion.⁶⁵

Henry Ward, Radical Member for Sheffield, accused Viscount Sandon of implying that the motion had been brought forward at a time when there was a probability of a dissolution of the House, and if the Government supported the motion, they would be accused of trying to win popularity for the imminent election. He believed that it was necessary to take strong measures to preserve the peace, and he asked Duncombe not to bring the House to a division as this would only hurt his own cause.⁶⁶ Viscount Sandon denied the charge against him, and he was followed by Duncombe, who denied that he had brought forward the motion for election purposes. The petition had been circulated two to three months before there was a possibility of dissolution, and he felt bound to go to division.⁶⁷

Jones quotes from McDouall's Chartist and Republican Journal, no. 12:

⁶⁴Ibid., p. 761. ⁶⁵Ibid., p. 762.

⁶⁶Ibid., p. 763. ⁶⁷Ibid., p. 764.

All strangers rushed out, the doors were bolted, and whilst murmurs of anxiety filled the passages the bolts creaked again and out rushed the members. "How has it gone, sir?" "Votes equal, 58 and 58." "How has the Speaker given it?" "Against." "Damn him."⁶⁸

The Speaker, the Hon. Charles S. Lefevre; Liberal Member for Hampshire, considered that the vote, if carried, would interfere with the prerogative of the Crown. He therefore declared himself with the Noes and the motion was defeated.⁶⁹ Again working class aims had run up against middle class social assumptions, and we see the difficulty of working within a system in which a class-based Parliament was a prime element.

This close vote, even though such a small proportion of the House was present, encouraged the Chartists to make plans for an even bigger petition, one in which the collection of signatures was to be done more systematically. The towns were divided into districts and a house to house canvass was carried out. The result was a monster petition with over three million signatures, which needed sixteen men to carry it into the House.

Prior to this event, however, in the course of a debate on the distress of the country, Birmingham's Chartist Radical Member, Joshua Scholefield, spoke of the vast and extensive suffering in the manufacturing districts because

⁶⁸Jones, p. 87.

⁶⁹Hansard, Third Series, vol. 58, Tuesday, May 25, 1841, p. 764.

of the slump in trade.⁷⁰ He noted that the ordinary people had no confidence in either party, but would prefer voting Conservative at the forthcoming election.⁷¹ There was no indication of collusion between Chartists and Tories, as had been suggested in the debate on the petition. Edward Barnes, Radical Member for Leeds, reported to the House that George White, a Chartist leader, speaking at a meeting in Leeds, had said: "It is a crime for a man to allow himself to starve in the midst of plenty."⁷² He used this to show the distress prevalent in the nation, but it well may have frightened those Members who were more concerned with the maintenance of law and order than with the people's welfare.

Parliament was dissolved on June 23, 1841, and a new one summoned to meet on August 19. In the general election which followed, the Conservatives won 369 seats, and those on the Ministerial side of the House won 289.⁷³ As a consequence the Whig administration resigned on August 30, and Peel formed a Conservative administration, with Sir James Graham at the Home Office.

The Chartist movement gathered strength during the winter of 1841 and the spring of 1842, when the depression

⁷⁰Ibid., vol. 58, Tuesday, June 15, 1841, p. 1520.

⁷¹Ibid., p. 1526. ⁷²Ibid., p. 1545.

⁷³William O. Aydelotte, "Parties and Issues in Early Victorian England," Journal of British Studies 5 (1966), p. 103.

in trade and industry worsened. On Monday, May 2, 1842, the second great National Petition was presented to the House by Thomas Duncombe. It was brought to the House by a great crowd. Its bulk was so great that it would not go through the doors until it was unrolled, and it spread "over a great part of the floor, and rose above the level of the Table."⁷⁴ Duncombe gave notice of a motion for May 3 that the petition be considered by the House. He also asked that representatives of those who had signed it should be heard at the Bar of the House to support their allegations. He stated that the petition had been signed by 3,315,752 men and women of the "industrious classes," and he believed that all the signatures were genuine.⁷⁵ The Clerk read the petition, which listed the people's grievances. The suggested remedy for these ills was that Parliament should pass into law "The People's Charter."⁷⁶

On the same day as this motion was brought before the Commons, Lord Brougham presented a petition to the Lords from the provincial council of the National Complete Suffrage Union, dated April 15, 1841. It asked for the establishment of universal male suffrage, annual parliaments, vote by ballot and no property qualifications for M.P.'s. Brougham told the Lords that the council was composed of 90 to 100 delegates

⁷⁴Hansard, Third Series, vol. 62, Monday, May 2, 1842, p. 1373.

⁷⁵Ibid., pp. 1374-1375.

⁷⁶Ibid., pp. 1376-1381 [see appendix B].

from all parts of the country meeting in Birmingham. After drawing up the petition these delegates had convened a public meeting of many thousands, who had agreed to these demands. He noted in particular that the middle classes were most anxious that their fellow citizens should be brought within the pale of the constitution, and that the man who had organized the petition, Joseph Sturge, was a most respectable member of the Society of Friends.⁷⁷ Brougham obviously felt that the House would be more likely to take note of the petition if there appeared to be an alliance of both middle and working class citizens. Joseph Sturge, a Quaker and a Radical, was probably recognized as the man who had attempted to unite the middle-class and working-class leaders at the 1839 Birmingham Convention and in 1841 in the Complete Suffrage Union. The petition was read at length and then tabled.

When Duncombe rose on May 3, 1842 to submit his motion to the House he said: "... many call the Chartists of the present day wild and visionary persons as if the points upon which they lay so much stress were first devised by them"⁷⁸ The demand for constitutional reform went back to 1777, and he gave a resumé of its history, dwelling particularly on government repression and the disappointment felt by the ordinary people over the 1832 Reform Act. He

⁷⁷Ibid., vol. 63, Tuesday, May 3, 1842, pp. 3-4.

⁷⁸Ibid., p. 16.

stated his belief that the people felt that the present House was more corrupt and more disposed to class-legislation than ever before.⁷⁹ They had, therefore, formed 600 Chartist Associations, and 100,000 working-class adults actually "lay aside one penny per week of their wages for the purpose of carrying on and keeping up agitation in favour of their claim to the elective franchise."⁸⁰ Duncombe then gave evidence from Northern manufacturing districts that there was real distress. He spoke of soup kitchens being set up and people begging in the streets. He also quoted from the British Statesman, a report which described how the carcass of a diseased cow had been dug up for food by starving people.⁸¹ This was all information which was designed to win the support of M.P.'s who were concerned with social issues.

He then addressed Peel directly, asking what remedies he had in mind. Duncombe felt that the proposed income tax would simply reduce the middle classes to the level of the lower classes, and that Peel's proposed tariff reforms would put thousands out of work. He wondered if Peel would enforce law and order by suspending habeas corpus, and put down the Chartists by force. This should worry the M.P.'s concerned about retaining civil rights. He was sorry to see the Conservatives ridiculing the signatures on the petition, and denied that there had been any cheating to increase the

⁷⁹Ibid., pp. 13-19. ⁸⁰Ibid., pp. 20-21.

⁸¹Ibid., pp. 26-27.

number of signatures, but even if there had been, it would not alter the duty of the House to consider the petition.⁸²

The motion was seconded by J. Temple Leader, Chartist Radical Member for Westminster, who pointed out that the Tory newspapers were jeering at the whole proceedings. They claimed that only fifteen to twenty thousand had attended the meeting and that the signatures could not possibly be genuine. He felt that it was impossible to doubt either the sincerity or the numbers as during the last year "... no topic had attracted so much the attention of the people as what was called the Charter."⁸³ He advised the Members to attend some Chartist meetings to discover the ability and integrity of these men who paid their taxes and obeyed the law yet had no vote.

He recalled how Lord Campbell, the late attorney-general, after the prosecution of Chartists for holding seditious meetings said that "Chartism was entirely put down." He had told Lord Campbell then, as he told the House now, that the violence of Chartism had passed by, but that Chartism existed. All appeals to violence had been repudiated and the Chartists now appealed only to moral force. Chartism would never be put down till the people's grievances had been redressed. Journals such as the Quarterly Review and the Edinburgh Review might sneer at the petition, but at least this would draw attention to it.⁸⁴

⁸² Ibid.

⁸³ Ibid., p. 33.

⁸⁴ Ibid., pp. 33-35.

Dr. John Bowring, Chartist Radical Member for Bolton-le-Moors, supported the motion. The people, he said, felt oppressed and humiliated. They had made greater sacrifices in proportion to their means than the wealthy, and saw no reason why greater wealth should imply greater political sagacity. They wanted equal rights, and he felt that it would be unwise "in the present state of the public mind, agitated and excited as it was" to ignore their pleas. Again came the warning that at a time when social misery was mixed with political discontent, the country was at explosion point.⁸⁵

John Fielden, Oldham's Chartist Radical representative, also supported the petition. He quoted from a Burnley clergyman's letter which stated that many mills were closed, half the work force was on half time, and £500 per week was being paid out in relief. This gave Fielden, a long-time opponent of the New Poor Law of 1834, an opening to criticize this legislation, and to state that nothing but a radical change in the constitution would give the people their rights. He warned that the situation was deteriorating and begged Peel to hold out an olive branch to the petitioners.⁸⁶

We see the Chartist Radicals trying in various ways to appeal to the five groups of parliamentarians who showed an interest in the Chartists. Duncombe had reminded the M.P.'s that the movement was still widespread and active in

⁸⁵Ibid., pp. 35-38. ⁸⁶Ibid., pp. 38-39.

constituencies across the country; it therefore affected them all. They all reminded Radicals, Repealers, Liberals and Whigs that here was an issue which could be used to harass the Conservative Ministry. The loyalty and determination of the Chartists was stressed repeatedly, perhaps as a warning to those who feared these qualities, that concessions should be made. They reminded the socially conscious and the Evangelicals that there was a social issue to be dealt with here. The Paternalists were appealed to as the Chartist Radicals played upon their sympathy for the industrial poor, as they pointed out that this was an explosive situation in which property was in danger. Duncombe made a special appeal to the Whigs when he reminded them that the Chartists were but the Radicals of earlier days, and that like the Whigs, they were part of the tradition which included the Duke of Richmond and other aristocratic advocates of radical reform.⁸⁷ Leader tried to appease the M.P.'s who opposed Chartism because it threatened law and order by assuring them that physical force was ended, and had been replaced by moral force. Many parliamentarians feared Chartism because they feared its violence. It is questionable, therefore, how many of them would believe Leader's statement.

Sir John Easthope, the Radical Member for Leicester, spoke in favour of conciliation. He recognized the distress of the people, but he did not believe that the principles of

⁸⁷ Ibid., pp. 13-16.

the Charter would mitigate it.⁸⁸ Sir James Graham, Conservative M.P. for Dorchester and Home Secretary, opposed the motion, because if the House agreed to it, the House might excite hopes and hold out expectations that would not be fulfilled. Sir John Easthope should not support the motion either, since he had not supported William Crawford's motion on parliamentary reform on April 21, and which had contained the basic aims of the Charter. Graham took the opportunity to deny that the Conservatives were ridiculing the petition. He agreed that there was widespread distress and that the House must decide on a political remedy.⁸⁹

Sir John Easthope rose to explain that he opposed the propositions of the Charter; hence he had voted against Crawford's motion calling the attention of the House to petitions praying for reform of the representation. He believed, however, that the people should have the opportunity to explain their views to the House.⁹⁰ Crawford, the Liberal Member for Rochdale, had had his motion defeated by 226-67 in April 1842.⁹¹

Thomas Babington Macaulay, Edinburgh's Whig representative and famed historian, stated that if the petitioners were merely demanding an investigation into public distress, he could support the motion, but they were

⁸⁸Ibid., pp. 39-41. ⁸⁹Ibid., pp. 41-43.

⁹⁰Ibid., p. 43.

⁹¹Ibid., vol. 62, Thursday, April 21, 1842, p. 910.

demanding that the People's Charter should be made law. He could never support universal male suffrage, which he believed "would be fatal to all purposes for which government exists." It "is utterly incompatible with the very existence of civilization." Macaulay clearly stated his belief that civilization rested on the security of property and that, "We never can, without absolute danger, entrust the supreme Government of the country to any class which would, to a moral certainty, be induced to commit great and systematic inroads against the security of property." Here he is stating a belief held by all Conservatives, all Whigs, and by a goodly percentage of the Liberals in the House. It was the prime reason why they could not support the Chartists. This was, of course, well known to the Chartist Radicals. Macaulay went on to say that he firmly believed that the Chartists wanted to confiscate the funds, property and land of the rich as a remedy for the evils they complained of. He felt that this would ruin the rich and make the poor poorer. Macaulay did not blame the petitioners, for they were simply clutching at anything which held out hope of instant relief without seeing that such a solution might incur greater evil in the future.⁹² A government elected by people without property would give no guarantee of the security of those who had property. The Conservatives, who had been sympathetic to the Chartists in the late 1830's, could hardly be expected to

⁹² Ibid., vol. 63, Tuesday, May 3, 1842, pp. 43-52.

support them now if this were so. As well as heeding this Whig warning, they also had to realize that they constituted the party in power, and as such were responsible for maintaining law and order, and the protection of property.

John Roebuck, the Radical M.P. for Bath, was highly critical of Macaulay's speech, and implied that its theme had been taken from an article in the Edinburgh Review. He seemed to be speaking in favour of the Petition when he stated that to exclude the majority of British citizens from having a voice in the control of public affairs, was to allow a minority to oppress a majority, and he rejected Macaulay's claim that the Chartists were hostile to property. Roebuck then went on to leave himself wide open to attack. He spoke of the Petition's "trashy doctrine" which had been written by a "malignant, cowardly demagogue," that is Feargus O'Connor. What was important was that three million ordinary people had signed it. This group was so large that if it rose up the Government would not have the power to put it down. It was, however, a law-abiding peaceful group.

Roebuck pointed out that he had voted for Crawford's motion for reform of the system of representation. Now he would cast his vote not for the Petition as a whole, but for the Charter because he believed that universal suffrage would produce better government. He felt it would be helpful to bring into Parliament people who understood the situation in the country and who could demonstrate to Peel's aristocratic ministry the harm being done by class legislation. He

concluded by making a statement which proved to be true, that the ordinary people would still choose the rich and the intelligent to represent them.⁹³ Old habits die hard.

Lord Francis Egerton, Conservative M.P. for South Lancashire, agreed with Macaulay that the petition was "trashy and contemptible," and ridiculed Roebuck for expecting the acceptance of the Charter to usher in some new Utopia. Violent transfer of power had led to evil in the past, and he believed that "the armed man would rise." He felt that the Government would not be fit to rule if it acceded to this request.⁹⁴ The role of the Government was to maintain order in the land.

Benjamin Hawes, the Radical Member for Lambeth, claimed that although he had always supported practical reform measures he could not support a petition from the masses, who had been blindly led by men who "used language of the most outrageous character." Just as there was class legislation of the few, he felt that class legislation of the many might prove injurious to the country.⁹⁵ He was only a fringe supporter of the Chartist cause.

The Chartist Radical Member for Kilkenny felt that it was unfair to judge all by the rash and violent language of a few hotheads. Joseph Hume repudiated Macaulay's claim that the people would despoil the country if they were granted

⁹³Ibid., pp. 52-59. ⁹⁴Ibid., pp. 60-61.

⁹⁵Ibid., pp. 62-63.

political rights, and accused him of using scare tactics.

He believed that the people had been patient, and "... the surest way to prevent revolution was to listen to and redress the well-grounded complaints of the people."⁹⁶ He was trying to undo the damage which Roebuck had done.

There had been some laughter in the House while he was speaking and he demanded to know if the Members were laughing at the miseries of the people. He went on to claim that injustice must come from a system of class-legislated monopolies, which benefitted the few at the expense of the many. The question of class is very evident here. Peel's proposed tariff reforms would take years to work out and the people needed immediate relief. He supported the points of the Charter, and was sure that if a large electorate were created, bribery and corruption at elections would be less likely.⁹⁷

Thomas Wakley, Chartist Radical Member for Salford, expressed his surprise that Hawes, a Member for a metropolitan borough, whose representatives had always been liberal, would not support the motion. He also wondered at the silence of the ministry. Wakley stressed that although a vote for or against such a motion might be construed as a vote for or against the Charter, he believed that the question was "simply whether the petitioners would be allowed to state their case. He believed that the working men of England were

⁹⁶ *Ibid.*, pp. 63-64. ⁹⁷ *Ibid.*, pp. 66-70.

sincere and honest - a comment greeted by cheers from both sides of the House. He posed the unanswerable question: how could the inhabitant of a £10 house be seen as more trustworthy than one who lived in a £5 one?⁹⁸

Lord John Russell, Whig M.P. for London, stated he was present in the House for two reasons; to express respect for the petitioners and abhorrence of the doctrines in the petition. He did not believe that every male had the right to vote, but that property, intelligence and knowledge should be the qualifications. With the present position of popular education, and the country in its present condition, he could envisage "a state of popular ferment" if universal suffrage were granted. This was a standard position widely held by most Conservatives and Whigs, and by the less advanced Liberals. If, as Roebuck had stated, the Petition was drawn up by a "malignant and cowardly demagogue," would it not be possible for the uneducated and the ill-informed to elect such a man to Parliament. Russell then went on to make a comparison of Great Britain's situation with that in America. In the latter country, there was no monarchy, no established church, no great masses of property. Therefore, universal suffrage could be exercised without endangering order, but in Great Britain there were many interests holding society together which were at the same time possessors of great property, such as the aristocracy and the Church. He

⁹⁸Ibid., pp. 66-70.

looked upon this motion as a vote for or against the People's Charter, and if that were passed into law it would shake property, increase the distress of the workers and lead to a breakdown of law and order.⁹⁹

The Prime Minister continued in the same strain. Peel thought there were two propositions to be considered. The first was whether or not to hear the petitions; who would speak for them, and would it be a "malignant and cowardly demagogue?" He opposed this proposition on the grounds that if the House agreed to hear them, it might raise false hopes in them and in their followers. The second proposition was the issue of the Charter itself. Peel opposed this because he believed that manhood suffrage was incompatible with the form of government under which the country had lived for one hundred and fifty years.¹⁰⁰ There had been no change in the Conservatives' position. They had opposed the movement in opposition, and still did so as the Government.

Charles Pelham Villiers, Radical Member for Wolverhampton, believed that the politicians had brought this situation on themselves. The two great parties were constantly accusing each other of having evil motives, and the people had come to believe them, and to demand change. If the people were heard and treated fairly they might come to see the importance of bringing about change gradually. It

⁹⁹Ibid., pp. 70-76. ¹⁰⁰Ibid., pp. 76-81.

was wrong to identify those who supported this motion with being in favour of all the Chartist aims.¹⁰¹

Daniel O'Connell, the Repeal M.P. for Cork, supported the motion, not because the repeal of the union was one of the petition's objects but because he believed in universal suffrage. Again came the hint of a possible rising when he stated that there could be "no security for the continuance of the present orderly and peaceful habits of the working classes."¹⁰² Duncombe closed the debate by stating that "If the industrious classes should ever again condescend to approach this House by way of petition, I will be no party to their degradation after the manner in which I see them treated."¹⁰³

The composition of the House was inappropriate to their needs, and the class element in Parliament made it an instrument of class legislation.

The House divided: Ayes - 49; Noes - 287:- Majority - 236. Again Chartism had split the Liberals, with fifty-one voting for the motion and sixty-eight against it. All 221 Conservatives who cast their vote opposed the measure.

"Macaulay and Roebuck had slain the great Petition," as Hovell quotes from the Annual Register of 1842.¹⁰⁴

The year of 1842 was one of depression in the industrial areas, and inevitably there was wild talk and wild

¹⁰¹Ibid., pp. 82-84. ¹⁰²Ibid., pp. 85-86.

¹⁰³Ibid., p. 86. ¹⁰⁴Hovell, p. 258.

actions. There were riots in Blackburn in May, and in June, Richard Marsden had encouraged a large crowd on Enfield Moor to march to London on June 21 to demand the Charter from the Queen. The death of a young Sheffield Chartist, imprisoned in York Castle for conspiracy and riot, gave the cause another martyr, and Chartists began to speak of taking violent action, and workers began to strike when there was talk of reducing wages.

They began in the Staffordshire collieries with a strike for the non-political object of obtaining higher wages and improved working conditions. The colliers drew the plugs on the boilers to make work impossible, hence the name - the Plug Plots. In the Commons John L. Ricardo, Radical M.P. for Stoke-on-Trent, asked the Home Secretary whether the Government had received any news of the disturbances in Staffordshire. Sir James Graham replied that he had received reports of disturbances in the Potteries, but that they were not of an alarming nature. A small military force had been sent into the area to preserve the peace, and that had been all the precautions that he had considered necessary.¹⁰⁵ These strikes, however, were to spread. The Chartists had discussed taking strike action at many of their meetings, but they did not provide the initial organization. They were, however, more than willing to use the situation which developed to aid their cause. They attributed the

¹⁰⁵Ibid., vol. 65, Saturday, July 16, 1842, p. 222.

proposed reduction in wages to the "malice of the Anti-Corn Law manufacturers,"¹⁰⁶ anxious to make the people desperate, and thus to cause disturbances which would perhaps paralyze the actions of what they considered to be a Protectionist Government. In no time at all the country had been aroused. At a meeting of the Lancashire and Cheshire strikers on Mottram Moor later in the year, on August 7, they resolved that "all labour should cease until the People's Charter became the law of the land."¹⁰⁷

On July 21, 1842, the ever-vocal Duncombe moved an address to the Queen asking that if Government measures failed to improve the prevailing conditions of distress, then Parliament should be recalled before winter caused these conditions to deteriorate. He stated that there was great alarm in the country, that Peel's tariff reforms and the imposition of the income tax had made matters worse, and that he feared that the present relatively quiet state of the country would soon be disrupted.¹⁰⁸

Duncombe went on to quote from a report produced by a Chartist who had been sent to Birmingham by his local council to try to dissuade the people from rising:

The peaceful conduct of the people is not as Sir R. Peel declared to be attributed to "their respect for or fear of the law," for these people generally believe existing laws and the present legislative to

¹⁰⁶Hovell, p. 260. ¹⁰⁷Ibid.

¹⁰⁸Hansard, Third Series, vol. 65, Thursday, July 21, 1842, pp. 404-406.

be extremely bad. . . . the suffering people are now falling into despair, and a murmur runs among them that they must help themselves.¹⁰⁹

Duncombe went on to quote from a speech made at a Chartist meeting:

Serious assaults upon property have been mediated and only repressed by the efforts of those too often in scorn styled the "physical force Chartists."¹¹⁰

To make sure the House did not think that this threat to law and order was a Chartist dream, Duncombe also quoted from a speech made by Mr. Holland Hoole, a high Tory and also the boroughreeve of Salford:

The strong probability was, that there would be an outbreak throughout a large extent of the manufacturing districts in the ensuing winter, unless remedial measures were adopted. . . . a number of district magistrates, apprehending this outbreak, were determined to resign their commissions, and not to permit themselves to be the tools of the aristocracy.¹¹¹

Henry Ward, Chartist Radical M.P. for Sheffield, and a free-trader, seconded the motion. He favoured tariff reforms, but while making apparent concessions, he felt that the Conservative measures had preserved untouched all the monopoly and exclusive advantage of their supporters. He cited his own constituency, which had lost the Continental and American hardware markets, and now had between ten and fifteen thousand of the working population destitute. He felt apprehensive about the future, and concluded by reading

¹⁰⁹ Ibid., pp. 407-408. ¹¹⁰ Ibid., p. 408.

¹¹¹ Ibid.

a letter from some of his constituents describing conditions and saying that as many as could afford to were emigrating to America and Russia.¹¹²

John L. Ricardo, Radical Member for Stoke-on-Trent, pointed out that, "Death and the law hold no terrors for starving people" and that the people would not only stop working themselves but would stop others from working.¹¹³

Ricardo went on to read from letters describing the disturbances in the Potteries. The first was written on July 20 by a colliery owner who stated that every colliery within ten miles of Hanley was closed, that thousands of colliers were assembling, armed with weapons to terrorize those who wanted to work, and that machinery had been destroyed. The magistrates had done nothing to stop armed men meeting, and as they had proved useless, this man planned to arm his family and servants.¹¹⁴

The second letter he quoted from warned that master colliers would prefer to blow out their furnaces rather than raise wages, as they were losing money on the iron they sold. With so many out of work the spirit of rebellion was spreading, although the presence of the military had improved matters slightly. The workhouses were filled, consequently outdoor relief was being given.¹¹⁵

¹¹² Ibid., pp. 412-418.

¹¹³ Ibid., pp. 431-432.

¹¹⁴ Ibid., pp. 433-434.

¹¹⁵ Ibid., pp. 434-435.

The third letter Ricardo quoted from told of colliers organizing a committee to meet daily and to send emissaries to other districts to get them to join the strike. Ricardo felt these accounts would give the House some idea of the trouble which lay ahead.¹¹⁶

The Liberal Member for Manchester, Mark Philips, stated that he had never wanted an extension of the suffrage and had never joined the Chartists, but every day now he saw highly respected men of good character and moral worth who said that they had asked Parliament for justice in vain. These men now felt that they must join those who advocated great change. He himself advocated free trade in order to open up industry and alleviate distress.¹¹⁷ Both Liberals and Radicals are warning what they see as a Protectionist Conservative Government that unless they are prepared to change their policies, many previously law-abiding citizens might well join the strikers or the Chartists. There was a feeling growing that a radical change had to come. Liberal and Radical M.P.'s saw trouble in their own constituencies developing, hence the interest in Chartism.

Unfortunately, by breaking the law the Chartists fell into the same trap as many radicals who had gone before them. They placed those who were oppressing them by passing class-biased legislation in the position of upholders of the law. However, when the lower classes are pushing the upper classes

¹¹⁶Ibid., pp. 436-437. ¹¹⁷Ibid., pp. 446-452.

there is a response. Certainly, neither physical force nor seditious writings could win the day for the Chartists.

Traditional society rested on certain ethics and values of conservative politics and bourgeois morality, and the parliamentarians who opposed the Chartists' attempt to challenge society and themselves, and were seen by others as protecting the accepted values of their society, and no social order can exist without the consent of the people.

Viscount Palmerston, the Liberal M.P. for Tiverton, noted the one-sided nature of the debate, for indeed few Conservatives had spoken. They must have been aware of the growing discontent in their own constituencies; but were not prepared to speak against their ministry's law and order policies. Palmerston berated Disraeli in particular for speaking at length on past Liberal foreign policy, but not uttering a word about current Conservative domestic policy. Palmerston believed that the House should show its sympathy for the common people and provide them with a gleam of hope.¹¹⁸ Duncombe wound up the debate by reiterating his demands and the House divided: Ayes 91; Noes 147: Majority 56.¹¹⁹

On Monday, July 25, Chartism was once more a subject for discussion. Duncombe made a motion that a copy of the deposition upon which a group of Chartists were committed for trial, and the jurors should be given to the House. He believed that the right of the people to meet peaceably in

¹¹⁸Ibid., pp. 467-468. ¹¹⁹Ibid., pp. 482-484.

public to discuss public grievances had been violated by the Staffordshire magistrates. This would interest the M.P.'s who felt strongly about civil rights and social justice.

Duncombe then described the circumstances of this case in detail. Rumour had gone about that magistrates in Sedgely had warned that, if any Chartist appeared in the town he would be arrested. Mason, a Chartist lecturer, believing he had the right to do so, held a meeting in Sedgely. He had been lecturing for about ten minutes when a constable broke up the assembly and the men were charged with unlawfully meeting, riot and assault. The constable had accused Mason of using seditious language, and in order to end the meeting he "took hold of the bench on which Mason was standing and tilted up the lecturer." Mr. Mason took out a warrant against the constable, and the latter took one out against Mason. Mason was committed for trial, at which the constable was the only witness, and was found guilty, as were the other men present. The charge against the constable was dismissed. Duncombe felt that such treatment was likely to inflame the feelings of the workers in Staffordshire, where the situation was already very unstable. The motion was seconded by Joseph Hume, the Chartist Radical Member for Kilkenny.¹²⁰

The Home Secretary said that the men had received a fair trial and that he could not countenance the House being

¹²⁰Ibid., Monday, July 25, 1842, pp. 589-592.

asked to constitute itself as a court of appeal against the verdict of the Court. He also denied that the magistrates had tampered with the jury.¹²¹ The debate then turned on the question of whether a constable had the right, or was indeed competent, to judge whether language was seditious. The Government argued that it was the constable's duty to see that no breach of the peace occurred, but Radical M.P.'s disagreed.

The Hon. Charles Pelham Villiers, the Radical Member for Wolverhampton, felt that it was important that the House and the people should know if meetings to discuss political questions might be held. If the law were clear it might prevent future violations.¹²² The Radical Member for Dumfries, William Ewart, brought up the example of a similar case at Manchester, but there the people had been bearing arms. He also pointed out that Mr. Justice Bailey had laid it down at York that there must be something to "terrify the people" before a meeting could be said to be unlawful.¹²³

The official attitude towards Chartist meetings of both Whig and Tory governments had been quite reasonable, and magistrates had avoided undue interference with meetings, according to Mr. Justice Bailey's ruling. This occurrence of interference in Staffordshire may well have been in response to the increasing number of strikes, machinery breaking and

¹²¹Ibid., pp. 592-594. ¹²²Ibid., p. 604.

¹²³Ibid., p. 605.

the arming of the strikers. It seems likely that it was a decision of local magistrates rather than of the Home Office, for Graham, although taking a more serious view of the threat of disorder than had his Whig predecessor, did not expect trouble to occur until the winter months.

The Parliamentary Radicals had been very active in this period in an effort to persuade the Government and the House that they need not fear an outbreak of Chartist violence. When rioting broke out the Government hoped that the local magistrates would use only civil forces to maintain law and order.

The Conservative Government took measures to bring the outbreaks to an end by arresting some individuals, by spreading distrust among the insurgents and by arresting the members of the Manchester Trades Conference. Graham believed that these trade delegates formed the link between the Trade Unions and the Chartists.¹²⁴ By August, rioting was ended. The Chartists, by adopting strikes which they had not originated, laid themselves open to greater suspicion and heavier punishments. Sir Frederick Pollock, the Attorney-General, who had defended the Newport rebels, now indicted Feargus O'Connor, the Chartist delegates, the leaders of the turn-out mobs and some of the trade delegates as general

¹²⁴F.C. Mather, "The Government and the Chartists," Chartist Studies, ed. Asa Briggs, London: MacMillan and Co. Ltd., 1959, p. 399.

conspirators.¹²⁵ By the time they were brought to trial in 1843, public opinion had swung in their favour, and they were treated with leniency. O'Connor was found guilty, but his conviction was overruled on technical grounds, and he was free to establish his supremacy over the Chartist movement.

The Chartist Radicals and their supporters had to work to re-cast the parliamentary system from within, and were opposed by a group of politicians who operated with their minds set in a society which was traditionally structured. The Chartists hoped to get people of their own persuasion into the House of Commons to prevent class-biased legislation from being passed, but the class structure of Parliament made it difficult to achieve. The bias of the men who opposed the Chartists was not solely the product of self-interest, but was a reflection of society's outlook. Chartist objectives came face to face with upper and middle class social assumptions:

¹²⁵Ibid., p. 391.

Chapter 4

THE FINAL PEAK

The disorders which spread from the Potteries in the summer of 1842 were not initiated by the Chartists, but began as strikes for higher wages and the removal of a variety of economic abuses. Donald Read quotes from the Manchester Times of July 9, 1842 about, "... the deep and ravaging distress that prevails . . ."¹ At a protest meeting on Mottram Moor on August 7, the approximately ten thousand present passed a resolution calling for "... a fair day's wage for a fair day's work . . ." and the adoption of the Charter, according to the Manchester Guardian.² The strikes then spread throughout the Lancashire cotton districts.

By mere coincidence a national Chartist delegate meeting was held in Manchester in the third week of August. The national leaders urged the strikers to stay out until the People's Charter had become law. Mobs of so-called "turn-outs" then toured the Lancashire mill districts, pulling out the boiler plugs to keep the mills closed. The Chartists did

¹Donald Read, "Chartism in Manchester," Chartist Studies, ed. Asa Briggs, London: MacMillan and Co. Ltd., 1959, p. 53.

²Ibid.

not originate these activities, but they were prepared to use them to further their own ends.³

From Lancashire the strikes crossed the Pennines, but in Yorkshire Chartism was not greatly concerned with wide national issues and was mainly concerned with local industrial conditions. When unrest spread to Scotland, however, rallies of the unemployed demanded immediate relief, and some resolved to continue striking until the Charter was adopted. The Scottish movement was characterized by "... pursuit of long-term ends by means of education and social reform."⁴

As the Government brought the outbreaks in the industrial North to an end by prosecuting both Chartists and Trade Union leaders, disorders broke out in the agricultural counties of West Wales, particularly Carmarthenshire and Pembrokeshire. The Rebecca Riots, so called because the rioters dressed as women and worked under a leader called Rebecca, were mainly directed against local grievances, such as road tolls, high rents, tithes and heavy poor rates. In England, however, Chartism began to enter a period of decline as there was a slow but general economic improvement, and Feargus O'Connor became preoccupied with his land scheme. Someone had to revive an interest in the movement.

³Ibid.

⁴Alex Wilson, "Chartism in Glasgow," Chartist Studies, ed. Asa Briggs, London: MacMillan and Co. Ltd., 1959, p. 249.

Who else would do this but the indefatigable Thomas Slingsby Duncombe. On August 4, 1842 this Chartist Radical Member for Finsbury raised the question of the imprisonment of John Mason, who had become a martyr to the Chartist cause. The people of Stafford and Sedgely had raised money to support Mason's family, and those of other men who had been arrested at the same meeting. Duncombe saw this as proof that the people believed that they had been convicted unjustly, and felt that he was justified in asking the House to intervene on the prisoners' behalf. This was an issue which touched on the rights and the liberties of the people. If the Home Secretary's directives were followed they would not be legally able to meet to discuss their sufferings. Duncombe asked Graham to reconsider the case, and threatened that if he refused, then he, Duncombe, would ask the House to present an address to the Queen asking her to give the men an immediate discharge. Graham refused for Mason was no ordinary working man meeting with others to discuss his grievances, but a paid lecturer who had deliberately gone into an area where the people were unemployed and could be easily roused.⁵

Benjamin Hawes, the Lambeth Radical M.P., hoped that the people would not be deterred from meeting to express their opinions because "the exercise of this right constituted one

⁵ Mangard, Third Series, vol. 65, Thursday, August 4, 1842, pp. 1054-1057.

of the safeguards of the liberties of the people." He also questioned the right of police constables to judge the legality of public meetings, and to interfere at such meetings. H.G. Redhead Yorke, the Liberal M.P. for Yorke, also challenged the Home Secretary. He accused the Sedgely magistrates of offering to make a deal with the prisoners, who would receive a light sentence if they pleaded guilty. They both encouraged Duncombe to persist with his motion.⁶ Joseph Brotherton, the Radical M.P. for Salford, a supporter of free trade and a parliamentary spokesman for the factory movement, disagreed; and asked Duncombe not to press the motion.⁷ Duncombe, however, refused, for he still believed that the magistrates had acted "for party purposes."⁸ The House divided - Ayes 30; Noes 53: Majority 23.⁸

Sir James Graham, Peel's Home Secretary, and an efficient administrator, gained a reputation for severity during the Plug Plot disturbances by urging magistrates to "act with vigour and without parley," as stated in a Home Office directive to the Huddersfield magistrates dated August 17, 1842. He also advocated the suppression of large public meetings in another directive dated August 19, 1842.⁹ He was, however, willing to inquire into the reasons for the disorders, although he believed that "the law and civil

⁶Ibid., pp. 1057-1058. ⁷Ibid., p. 1058.

⁸Ibid., pp. 1058-1060.

⁹F.C. Mather, Public Order in the Age of the Chartists, New York: Augustus M. Kelley, 1967, p. 43.

rights must be upheld by power," as Mather quotes from C.S. Parker's biography of Graham.¹⁰ It would seem that the Home Secretary was by no means intimidated by the Radicals' attacks upon his policies in the Commons. He did, however, feel that working-class discontent might be mitigated by "removing the taxes from essential foodstuffs, by fostering public education and by inquiring into frauds practiced by masters."¹¹

Mather states that Graham was "almost puritanical" in his scruples concerning the employment of secret agents. When he heard that spies had been employed to attend Chartist meetings to obtain information, he wrote to the Crown prosecutor, John Gregory, "I would not on any account sanction such a mode of obtaining information."¹² Some parliamentarians, however, were not so sure about Graham's scruples. On August 12, 1842, Duncombe asked how Graham had come to know about a supposed Chartist meeting at Bridport on July 21, where, allegedly, violent language had been used. According to Mather, bureaucratic links with the provinces had long been forged. The oldest of them was the link between the General Post Office in London and provincial post office which could and did provide useful channels of information.¹³

Graham had directed Mr. Manners Sutton of the Home Office to write to the mayor of Bridport to ask who was

¹⁰Ibid., p. 44. ¹¹Ibid. ¹²Ibid., p. 202.

¹³Ibid., p. 185.

responsible for allowing a Chartist meeting to be held in the Town-hall under the sanction of the municipal authorities. Duncombe read this letter, and the reply from the town clerk, E. Nicholetis, in the Commons. The town clerk stated that in the mayor's absence he had given permission for the meeting to be held. The application had come from a member of the town council who was also a respected Quaker, who had asked for the use of the hall for the Rev. Spencer of Hinton Charterhouse to deliver a lecture. The town clerk stated that he had attended the lecture himself, as had many other respectable townspeople, and had not been aware that it was a Chartist meeting, although he did remember an allusion to the points of the Charter. He assured Graham that no one would be permitted to use the hall whose opinions might excite the people or endanger the peace.

Duncombe felt that this was another example of the Government's inclination to interfere with the rights of public discussion, and he wished to know who was the informer, " . . . the constituted authorities of the town, or one of those wretches he was sorry to see employed - a description of spy,"¹⁴ and he moved that all correspondence on the subject should be tabled. He continued to keep the Chartist cause before the Government, the parliamentarians and in the public mind.

¹⁴ Hansard, Third Series, vol. 65, Friday, August 12, 1842, pp. 1306-1308.

Graham was stung by Duncombe's insinuations, and denied strongly that the Government had used spies. He assured the House that his informants had been respectable citizens, and as it was his duty to maintain law and order, he had made inquiries to ascertain if it were true that a Chartist meeting had taken place and that violent language had been used.¹⁵ Graham quoted a passage from Spencer's speech in which he had accused the Government of preventing free discussion. Spencer was known to be a supporter of the Complete Suffrage Union. He, like other middle-class dissenters who disliked the religious and political establishment on the one hand and feared physical force Chartism on the other, was able to support a form of Chartism which had merged with free trade sympathies.

Graham made it clear to the House that he would support the local authorities, but would expect them to co-operate with the Government to maintain law and order, and this led to an exchange with Benjamin Hawes, the Radical Member for Lambeth, who accused the Home Secretary of attempting to control the municipal authorities and to give the police the right to decide on the legality of public meetings. Hawes scorned Graham as a man who had once boasted of his Whig principles, yet upon becoming a minister, put down public discussion.¹⁶ This was not an unusual shift as a parliamentarian moved from opposition into government

¹⁵Ibid., pp. 1308-1309.

¹⁶Ibid., pp. 1311-1312.

and became responsible for maintaining public order. Nevertheless, it stung Graham to query the connection between Whig principles and Chartism, and he denied any interference with the right of the people to petition Parliament.

Joseph Hume commended Graham on his attitude towards spies, but went on to question him about the reasons for the unrest in the Manchester area, which he described as a "state of civil war." He asked for a copy of the correspondence between the Home Office and the military commander in Lancashire. He expressed his concern that Parliament should be prorogued at a time when the country was in "a most dangerous condition."¹⁷ Sir Thomas Wile, the Liberal Member for the city of Worcester, felt that it was dangerous to adhere to the principle that any meeting which might inflame the public in times of distress should be considered illegal. If such meetings could not be prevented then it seemed only sensible to hold them in municipal buildings under the eye of the authorities.¹⁸

The Liberal M.P. for Manchester, Mark Philips, assured the House that the municipal authorities and the manufacturers in his constituency would co-operate to maintain law and order. However, he begged the Government to give careful consideration to the evils in the manufacturing districts which "threatened to disorganize society and to

¹⁷Ibid., pp. 1312-1313. ¹⁸Ibid., pp. 1314-1315.

spread themselves wider and wider until they involved the whole country in one common ruin¹⁹ Certainly, the manufacturers in Mark Philips' constituency, who would not feel kindly disposed towards the Chartists, would note that he was keeping their interests before the House, whereas the Chartist Radicals and their supporters were bent on keeping the Chartist cause alive. Richard Cobden, the Liberal M.P. for Stockport, also stressed the position of the manufacturers, who stood to have their property destroyed in these disturbances. He claimed that, "Children had been instructed to destroy the spinning machines with knitting needles, and a box of lucifers could destroy the greatest amount of manufacturing capital."²⁰ In a society where property was of such great importance, and the commercial spirit had become a primary interest, statements such as those by Cobden and Philips would appeal to Conservatives, Whigs, Repealers, and the majority of the Liberals, while dealing a rebuff to the Chartist Radicals.

Henry Ward, the Sheffield Chartist Radical M.P., asked Peel to give the House some assurance that he would provide the people with a means of expression as a safety valve at this difficult time. An assurance of this kind from the Prime Minister would do more to pacify the country than any show of military force.²¹ The Chartist Radicals were getting worried, perhaps because O'Connor seemed to be

¹⁹Ibid., p. 1315. ²⁰Ibid. ²¹Ibid., p. 1316.

establishing his hold over the Chartist movement, and who could tell what extremes he might exhort his followers to take. Even the Radicals feared violence. Peel applauded the forbearance of the workers in difficult times and castigated those who by their inflammatory speeches had tried to arouse the people. He stressed that if given time, the fiscal reforms he had initiated would gradually bring about relief.²² At this point in the proceedings, Parliament was prorogued. Thus nothing came of Duncombe's motion to have the correspondence between the Home Secretary and the Mayor of Bridport tabled.²³

Relief did not come quickly, and on February 2, 1843 a passage in the Queen's speech at the re-opening of Parliament noted that "... the public peace in some of the manufacturing districts was seriously disturbed, and the lives and property of Her Majesty's subjects were endangered by tumultuous assemblages and acts of open violence."²⁴ P.W. Skinner Miles, the Protectionist M.P. for Bristol, attributed these outbreaks to the widespread spirit of agitation, which in turn encouraged the lower classes to "lend an ear to the suggestions of demagogues who propound wild and visionary schemes."²⁵ His view of the crowds' action was that the people were being manipulated. This was

²²Ibid., pp. 1316-1318. ²³Ibid., p. 1318.

²⁴Ibid., vol. 66, Thursday, February 2, 1843, p. 5.

²⁵Ibid., pp. 71-73.

the only way that he could explain the action of the people, and this was a fairly typical response from the upper classes. If the people were acting because of ideas which they held themselves, then they would be threatening to the established order. Political activity for people who had no political rights had to take the form of crowd activity, ineffective though it often proved.

In the course of the same debate in reply to a speech by Peel, Lord John Russell claimed that the workers were disturbing the peace because they believed that they were underpaid. He accused the Chartists of taking advantage of these people.

Strong inducements were held out to them to join in the projects for the Charter, and for the subversion of the Constitution, and that insidious attempts were made for that purpose by the most artful demagogues.²⁶

Lord John Russell pointed out that injury to life and property in the disturbances had been small, and he advised the Peel ministry to investigate the causes of distress and not to threaten the people with repressive measures.²⁷

Charles Pelham Villiers, Radical M.P. for Wolverhampton from 1836 until his death in 1898 and a scion of an aristocratic family, felt that suffering amongst the workers was increasing. He could see no sign of improvement, and accused the Peel Ministry of protecting the upper and middle classes but not the working class. Villiers was one of the

²⁶ Ibid., p. 111.

²⁷ Ibid., p. 112.

Philosophic Radicals in Parliament, and it was he who formed the link between the group of parliamentary advocates of free trade and the growing body of free trade opinion in the North of England.²⁸ Joseph Hume, another of the Philosophic Radicals, and also the Chartist Radical M.P. for Montrose, agreed that the labour of the poor, which was their only capital, should be protected as well as the capital of the rich. As another supporter of free trade, he also took the opportunity to point out that free trade would lower food prices for the workers as well as providing higher profits for the factory owners.²⁹

William Busfield Ferrand, the Conservative M.P. for Knaresborough who occasionally voted with the Young Englanders, felt that the only way to protect the poor was to impose a tax on machinery, which was taking away men's jobs. He attacked the Anti-Corn Law League and condemned all large manufacturers.³⁰ Ferrand belonged to that group of Conservatives who looked back to the time before industrialization with a nostalgia which was more romantic than realistic. Villiers was defended by the Liberal M.P. for Manchester, Thomas Milner Gibson, another prominent member of the Anti-Corn Law League. He reminded the House of Chartist invasions

²⁸W.H. Chaloner, "The Agitation Against the Corn Laws," Popular Movements, 1830-1850, ed. J.T. Ward, London: MacMillan and Co. Ltd., 1970, p. 41.

²⁹Hansard, Third Series, vol. 66, Thursday, February 2, 1843, pp. 137-149.

³⁰Ibid., pp. 149-151.

of League Meetings, and pointed out that manufacturers in the North were making collections to help the poor.³¹

Later in February 1843, Ferrand asked the Home Secretary if the Government had launched an inquiry into the recent violent outbreaks in the manufacturing districts, and if so, would the information be given to the Commons. Sir James Graham said that some offenders had already been tried while others would soon be brought to trial.³²

Graham had hoped to charge William Hill and Feargus O'Connor with high treason for their part in the Plug Plots, but the Attorney-General, Sir Frederick Pollock, had a different plan in mind. He prosecuted O'Connor and fifty-eight Northern Chartists and strike leaders together for seditious conspiracy. Ward quotes Pollock as deciding to

... try him in the same indictment with the worst of the defendants who headed mobs, made seditious speeches and stopped mills and factories. I shall blend in one accusation the head and the hands - the bludgeon and the pen.³³

The trial opened at Lancaster before Baron Rolfe on March 1, 1843, and O'Connor defended himself. Sixteen men were found guilty of using threatening language and fifteen others, including O'Connor, were found guilty of encouraging a strike. An error in the indictment, however, led to the

³¹Ibid., p. 154.

³²Ibid., Monday, February 20, 1843, pp. 940-941.

³³J. T. Ward, Chartism, London: B.T. Eatsford Ltd., 1973, p. 169.

release of the prisoners, and O'Connor was free to go on with his land scheme.

On March 13, Thomas Milner Gibson questioned the Home Secretary about these Chartist trials because he felt that Feargus O'Connor had used his cross-examination of James Wilcox, a witness for the prosecution, to attempt to implicate the Anti-Corn Law League in the disturbances which had taken place. At first, Gibson implied that there had been wrongdoing on the part of the Home Secretary. The latter had been subpoenaed by one of the defendants, but O'Connor made it known that if the prosecution intended to call Wilcox, it was all right for the Home Secretary to return to London. The Conservative Attorney-General had explained this to the judge, and had objected to any cross-examination on O'Connor's part which could possibly implicate persons not in court to defend themselves. Gibson accepted Pollock's explanation, and Thomas Duncombe rose to state that the Attorney-General's conduct at the trials had been acceptable to all.³⁴ It seems strange that the Chartist Radicals would so readily accept Pollock's explanation, because it would appear that the Attorney-General had deliberately tried to pin the responsibility for the Plug Plot disturbances on the Chartists, the Anti-Corn Law League and the trade unions. One is forced to wonder if there had been some "arrangement" made between the Conservative Attorney-General and O'Connor that the latter

³⁴ Hansard, Third Series, vol. 67, Monday, March 13, 1843, pp. 750-754.

would attempt to implicate the League in return for the error in the indictment which enabled O'Connor to go free. This is, however, only speculation. One would, however, have expected the parliamentarians to press the Government, especially the Liberals, if there was any suggestion of a Conservative-Chartist arrangement.

During the period of Chartist decline, few parliamentarians spoke about the movement. The ever-vigilant Duncombe, however, did his best to find issues to raise. On August 4, 1843, he drew the attention of the Commons to a petition from a group of Chartists in Hull, complaining about the manner in which a public meeting, held on April 13 to petition Parliament about William Jones, was broken up. Jones, a Chartist, had been sentenced to transportation for sedition. The petitioners insisted that the meeting was orderly and peaceful, that it did not obstruct the highway or terrorize the public, yet those in attendance were attacked by the police, who wielded staves, and injured many.³⁵ It is interesting to note that this petition was not presented by either of Hull's two Conservative M.P.'s, Sir John Hammer and Sir Walter James. The Home Secretary, however, assured the House that he had inquired into the case, and was satisfied that the magistrates had acted correctly in ordering the meeting dispersed only when darkness fell, although it had

³⁵Ibid., vol. 71, Friday, August 4, 1843, pp. 237-238.

actually obstructed several roads. He denied that the police had struck any blows or injured any people.³⁶

Thomas Gisborne, the Radical M.P. for Nottingham, considered this explanation unsatisfactory. He stated that he would support Duncombe's motion for a select committee to look into the matter because darkness was not a good reason to disperse a meeting, nor should the police be the arbiters of legality, but when the division came, he did not vote.

Joseph Hume also criticized Graham for making inroads into the public's liberties, and made the fair comment that since the working classes had to work during the daylight hours, they could only meet after dark.³⁷ The debate gradually fizzled out as there were few Members present and seemingly little interest in the subject.

When Parliament re-opened in 1844, the Queen's speech stated an increased demand for labour, and hoped that this had relieved the distress of the working people. Even Joseph Hume, a Chartist Radical, had to agree that things were improving.³⁸ William Sharman Crawford, Rochdale's Radical M.P., and a staunch advocate of parliamentary reform, brought forward a motion that the House should inquire into the people's grievances and devise measures to redress their complaints. He pointed out that Parliament was the proper organ of communication between the people and the Crown, but because of the limited franchise, the people were not fairly

³⁶Ibid., p. 238. ³⁷Ibid., pp. 239-240.

³⁸Ibid., vol. 72, pp. 3-59.

represented. They felt that their interests were abused by class legislation, and complained of the accumulation of capital and property in the hands of the few, while an unjust tax raised the price of food. When the House divided on Crawford's amendment he was supported by only twenty-nine Radicals, including all the Chartist Radicals who were present³⁹ (see appendix E).

Those issues which revolved around free trade, the poor law and factory reform divided the Chartists. Many supported them, while others feared too much government interference in people's lives. Changes in social conditions were going to require new principles of legislation. It was during this period that more M.P.'s became interested in social issues, and the Radicals began to gain support for their demands for government intervention to provide relief for a stricken populace. It was undoubtedly, as Lubenow states so succinctly, a major political question at a time when "traditional institutions were being undermined by the forces of change" to decide "what political forms" should bear the legal responsibility for absorbing the conflicts and tensions produced by social and economic change.⁴⁰ The paternalistic outlook of those M.P.'s who opposed the growth of state intervention idealized the past and admired its social arrangements with their ethic of 'noblesse oblige'.

³⁹ Ibid., February 1, 1844, pp. 79-139.

⁴⁰ William C. Lubenow, The Politics of Government Growth, Newton Abbot: David & Charles Ltd., 1971, p. 180.

social subordination and deference.⁴¹ There was, however, no large body of opinion in the House which dogmatically opposed all state intervention, nor one which favoured it. Hence we see the "application of separate cures for separate problems,"⁴² for a long period of time.

In May 1844, the validity of petitions to Parliament was impugned when Baillie Cochrane, the Liberal-Conservative M.P. for Bridport, questioned the M.P. for Rochdale about a petition supposedly from some Bridport residents, which the latter had presented to the Commons. Crawford admitted that he had been unable to discover its source. This was a real setback for the Chartists, for one of their most valuable tools, the right to petition Parliament, would lose its efficacy if it were proved that petitions were being manufactured.⁴³ However, it is doubtful how valuable petitions really were. The Chartists in the country as a whole and the Chartist Radicals in Parliament, were forced to work within a system of which Parliament was a prime element, and which was an instrument of the upper and middle classes. It was therefore opposed to the needs of the working classes, and unlikely to act upon their petitions. However, petitioning Parliament did keep the Chartist cause from being completely ignored by the parliamentarians.

⁴¹Ibid., p. 183. ⁴²Ibid., p. 187.

⁴³Hansard, Third Series, vol. 74, Monday, May 6, 1844, pp. 713-714.

Although the manufacturing and mining districts were the main centers of disorder, the burning of hayricks was a constant reminder that all was not well in rural England. In June 1844, Thomas Milner Gibson, the Liberal M.P. for Manchester, asked the Home Secretary if the incendiarism taking place in East Anglia had received any serious attention from the Government. Gibson was a Suffolk magistrate and had represented Ipswich as a Conservative from 1837 to 1839. When he became a Liberal he was defeated by six votes, and successfully sought re-election in Manchester in 1841. Graham assured the House that he had been in touch with the Lords Lieutenant and the magistrates of the three counties and had concluded that the fires were the work of a few people motivated by personal grievances, and that the peasantry as a whole was not involved and did not countenance the crimes.⁴⁴

On June 18, the Earl of Stradbroke presented a petition from the town of Stow to the Lords. It stated that fires were being set both day and night, and asked the House to appoint a commission of inquiry into the causes. The Earl felt that unemployment was the primary cause, but that the penalties being imposed were not harsh enough to act as a deterrent. Lord Denman disagreed with the statement that incendiarism was a symptom of general discontent, but agreed that the law needed to be clarified. Lord Wharcliffe, for

⁴⁴Ibid., vol. 75, Wednesday, June 12, 1844, pp. 585-586.

the Government, said that he would mention the Lords' suggestions to the Home Secretary.⁴⁵

Chartism had on the whole failed to capture the interest and support of the agricultural workers, probably because they were fairly isolated and still dependent upon their employers. As Hugh Fearn states in his essay, "Chartism in Suffolk," "because their horizon was limited they resorted to incendiarism in 1844 when angered by unemployment and the threat of the Poor Law 'Bastille'."⁴⁶ However, there was a suggestion in the Commons that some of the men involved were Chartists. The action of these agricultural workers was spontaneous and sporadic, and when it occurred it was directed against a particular grievance, but not against the system. It was, however, easy for the parliamentarians who were opposed to the Chartist movement to blame every outbreak of violence upon the movement, even though it was a reaction to popular grievances, and did not aim at fundamental social change.

The next reference to Chartism came during a debate which concerned foreign rather than domestic affairs. On July 2, 1844, during a debate on the opening of aliens' mail, and the effect that this would have on Britain's relations with other countries, Thomas Duncombe pointed out that this

⁴⁵Ibid., Tuesday, June 1844, pp. 1091-1092.

⁴⁶Hugh Fearn, "Chartism in Suffolk," Chartist Studies, ed. Asa Briggs, London: MacMillan & Co. Ltd., 1959, p. 172.

practice had been carried out with the mail of certain British subjects for at least two years. During the 1842 disturbances he claimed to know of two people who had been sent from the secret office of the General Post Office in London to the manufacturing districts, and who went from place to place opening the mail of those suspected of causing the disturbances. The House showed a singular lack of interest in Duncombe's claims, but was far more concerned with the opening of the mail of aliens. The Commons agreed to the setting up of a Committee of Secrecy to inquire into the detention and opening of mail at the Post Office, and the way authority to do this had been exercised and by whom it had been given.⁴⁷ When the topic was debated in the Lords on the following day, all comments were directed to the effect that the opening of aliens' mail would have upon foreign relations.

Duncombe was not to be silenced, however, and on July 18 he reiterated his charge. He claimed that "a roving commission had been sent down in 1842 to open letters throughout the manufacturing districts."⁴⁸ Certainly, the link between the General Post Office in London and the provinces had been of long standing. F.C. Mather quotes Official Instruction No. 19 which required the local postmasters "to transmit for the information of the Post Master General an account of all the remarkable occurrences within their

⁴⁷ Hansard, Third Series, vol. 76, Tuesday, July 2, 1844, pp. 212-218.

⁴⁸ Ibid., p. 1011.

districts."⁴⁹ William Moore, postmaster of Huddersfield, sent frequent reports, and indeed, was caught out in his actions, so that Richard Oastler published a placard in the form of an open letter to the Home Secretary in January 1838, which concluded with the words: "I think, my Lord, it is hardly fair to degrade the office of Post Master into that of a Spy."⁵⁰

As well as the Post Office, the inspectorate of mills and factories instituted in 1833, was long suspected of being used as an agency for keeping track of the workers' activities. A Select Committee had reported to the Commons in 1840 that the Home Office had used the inspectors to gain knowledge of the local plans of the Chartists. James Stuart, an inspector, admitted to the committee that he had received confidential instructions from the Secretary of State, and had in turn sent letters to various superintendents, asking them to report on the political meetings of the workers.⁵¹ Fielden embarrassed the government in 1840 by reading from this letter.⁵²

The first warrant against the Chartists was issued by the Home Secretary on February 8, 1839, when he ordered the opening of the mail of four delegates to the National

⁴⁹Mather, p. 185. ⁵⁰*Ibid.*, p. 186.

⁵¹Leon Radzinowicz, A History of English Criminal Law and its Administration from 1750, vol. 4, London: Stevens, 1840, p. 241.

⁵²Hansard, Third Series, vol. 55, Wednesday, July 17, 1840, pp. 785-788.

Convention. In August of the same year, it was decided to intercept and copy Frost's mail.⁵³ It seems ironic, therefore, that exposure of this means of obtaining information should come during a debate on its use in the interests of British diplomacy abroad, not on its use as a means of preserving order at home. At a time when the response to Chartism was distinctly apathetic, Duncombe was able to raise a storm of indignation in the country and in the House, as well as securing the appointment of secret committees of both Houses to investigate the Home Secretary's powers.

During the years when Chartism was weak and much preoccupied with O'Connor's land scheme, little was heard of the movement in Parliament. Tempers did flare in March 1846 when Duncombe, who showed much concern for the Chartist prisoners, made a motion for an address to the Queen, asking for mercy to be shown to the leaders of the Newport Rising. He stated that he had received petitions on the prisoners' behalf from all parts of the country, including one from Abergavenny, which included amongst its 633 signatures those of six of the jury which had tried these men. Duncombe tried to convince the Commons that Frost's only object in marching to Newport was to make a moral demonstration in favour of the imprisoned Vincent, not to raise a nation-wide rebellion.

Duncombe then read at length from public letters sent by the Liberal historian, Thomas Babington Macaulay to

⁵³Mather, pp. 220-223.

his Edinburgh constituents. Duncombe claimed they were written to prejudice his motion. In one letter, Macaulay accused the prisoners of raising a rebellion and leading "thousands of ignorant labouring men into guilt and danger." He warned that more insurrections would follow if "turbulent and designing men" discover that the penalty for raising a civil war would be less than "the penalty of robbing a hen-roost." Macaulay believed that non-electors should be interested in the security of property and the maintenance of law and order. He reminded the House that in the 1842 Chartist petition they had avowed that their object was "the destruction of all property." One of Macaulay's letters concluded with the words: "I refused them the franchise as I would refuse a razor to a man who told me he wanted it in order to cut his throat."

Duncombe claimed that Macaulay had misunderstood the 1842 petition, and that the Chartists did not want the destruction of life or property. He felt that he had some support in the House for his motion, and compared this case with that of the Canadian rebels who had been involved in a rebellion and yet had received an amnesty.⁵⁴ Sir James Graham agreed that the working classes felt strongly about this issue, but the House should not interfere with the

⁵⁴ Hansard, Third Series, vol. 84, Tuesday, March 10, 1846, pp. 867-880.

Sovereign's prerogative, and in view of the serious nature of the rising, he could not at present recommend clemency.⁵⁵

Macaulay then rose to reply to Duncombe. He first dealt with the matter of the letters from which the Finsbury Chartist Radical had quoted at such length. They had, he said, been published without his consent by those holding the same views as Duncombe, which proved that he had not arranged to publish them to prejudice the appeal for clemency. Nevertheless, Macaulay claimed he still believed that his interpretation of the 1842 Chartist petition was correct, and that the Government's role was to preserve life and property. Parliament should neither interfere with the prerogative of the Crown, nor should it set a precedent, which might mean that M.P.'s would be inundated with requests from their constituents. They would be anxious to please these people and this would keep them from dealing with more pressing business. The implication here was that the business of the working classes was not important.

Macaulay went over the events of the Newport Rising. He believed it was a crime against society and its ringleaders, who had induced "the unhappy multitude" to follow them, deserved no sympathy.⁵⁶ This was a parliamentarian who did not recognize the good judgement of the ordinary people, but saw them as sheep being led astray by strong leaders.

⁵⁵Ibid., pp. 881-888. ⁵⁶Ibid., pp. 888-895.

These men, he suggested, may have been aiming to establish a new form of government and to establish themselves as rulers.

Disraeli, the Conservative Member for Shrewsbury, reminded the House that he had been the only Tory M.P. to support this motion when it had been before the House five years ago, and had been defeated by only four votes. He pointed out that the period when the Newport Rising occurred was one of great political excitement. The expectations of the ordinary people had been raised, but not realized. Frost and the other ringleaders had exercised tremendous influence on the "organized masses of the people" and had been dealt with leniently, yet he was prepared to vote in their favour again. Disraeli, like Duncombe, compared the Newport Rising to the Rebellion in Canada, where some traitors were punished but others rewarded. Frost was transported and made a slave, but Papineau was made Speaker of the House of Assembly. If the House believed that it should support the minister who advised the Crown, then it must believe that the minister possessed the confidence of the House. Disraeli obviously felt that the position of the Peel ministry was not secure. The Government could continue to punish the Newport rioters as an example to society, or it could pardon them as an encouragement to the people to hope for mercy.⁵⁷ Robert Blake contends that the 1848 Session of Parliament saw Disraeli "in open rebellion against Peel," when he made a

⁵⁷ Ibid., pp. 896-901.

series of bitter attacks on his leader. The first arose as a result of the demand for a parliamentary inquiry into the alleged opening of a Radical M.P.'s letters under a warrant from the Home Office.⁵⁸ He again accused the Government of weakness in refusing clemency, but dangling the hope of achieving it at a later date.

The Honourable James Alexander Stuart Wortley, a Liberal-Conservative, was clearly incensed by Disraeli's attack on the Conservative ministry. As a supporter of law and order, he accused Disraeli of allowing his personal considerations to influence his decision. He felt that this debate had only served to revive the memory of the severity of the crime, and make it more difficult to extend mercy. In his opinion, the public would be outraged if these men were pardoned, while others, whose offences were less serious, remained in prison. He compared Frost to a notorious murderer, and rejected Duncombe's assertion that this rising was no more than a moral demonstration in favour of a Chartist prisoner. He firmly believed that had the attack on Newport succeeded, there would have been risings in the North. He suspected that the outbreak which followed in Sheffield was part of the same movement. The Prime Minister and Home Secretary of the time had considered the case to be very serious.

⁵⁸ Robert Blake, The Conservative Party from Peel to Churchill, London: Eyre and Spottiswoode Ltd., 1970, p. 124.

Certainly, Leon Radzinowicz agrees with Wortley. In his scholarly work on English criminal law, he notes that the account of all the measures taken against the agitations from the beginning of 1839 to the middle of 1840, published by the government at the request of Joseph Hume, testifies to the legality of all criminal proceedings and executive processes. He also notes that in 1840, of 300 Chartists brought to trial for offences such as high treason, sedition and libel, well over half were given sentences of six months or less, and that by May 1841 only 39 Chartists were still in prison. He does not believe that charges of victimization of Chartist prisoners were borne out by evidence.⁵⁹

There was, nevertheless, strong feeling in the country for Frost, Williams and Jones as Henry Aglionby, Radical M.P. for Cocker mouth, pointed out.⁶⁰ Thomas Wakley, the Chartist Radical M.P. for Finsbury, said that the petitioners were not attempting to justify the conduct of the Newport rebels. The latter did, however, feel that if they had been wealthy men from a higher class, they might have been treated differently. The petitioners saw the system within which they lived as being one designed by the upper classes for their own benefit. If the House continued to treat the petitions of the unrepresented people with indifference and scorn, it would be

⁵⁹Radzinowicz, pp. 249-251.

⁶⁰Hansard, Third Series, vol. 84, Tuesday, March 10, 1846, p. 905.

following a dangerous course.⁶¹ To shrug off these people and refuse to take their ideas seriously was a sign of the élitism of the parliamentary system.

Lord John Manners, the Conservative M.P. for Newark-on-Trent and a Young Englander, was convinced that the House should pay more attention to the "social and moral condition of the people" and less to "philosophical and political notions."⁶² It would then be sure that the "great institutions" would survive. Lord Manners expressed his revulsion against what Blake calls the "liberal utilitarian spirit of the time." His was "the reaction of a defeated class to a sense of its own defeat."⁶³

Mark Philips, the Liberal M.P. for Manchester, a city which had submitted many petitions on behalf of the Newport rebels, explained that he would oppose Duncombe's motion because he felt he must vote according to his conscience. This did not, however, mean that he treated the petitions of his constituents lightly.⁶⁴ He wasn't returned as Manchester's M.P. in the 1847 election, so perhaps his constituents did not believe him.

Lord John Russell reminded the House that, except for the disagreement of the judges over a legal technicality, the Home Secretary, Lord Normanby, had seen no reason why the

⁶¹Ibid., pp. 908-910. ⁶²Ibid., pp. 912-913.

⁶³Blake, p. 171.

⁶⁴Hansard, Third Series, vol. 84, Tuesday, March 10, 1846, p. 917.

death penalty should not be imposed. It should be remembered that at a special Commission at Monmouth on December 10, 1839 a grand jury had returned a true bill for high treason against Frost, Williams, Jones and eleven others. On December 12, 1839 Fox Maule, the Treasury Solicitor, delivered to each of the prisoners a copy of the indictment and a copy of the list of jurors returned by the sheriff. On December 17, he delivered to each of the defendants a list of the witnesses to be examined at the trial.⁶⁵ The law, however, required that when any person was indicted for high treason, a list of witnesses and jurors must be delivered to the prisoner "at one and the same time" as the copy of the indictment, and this must occur ten days before the trial.⁶⁶

The trial of Frost and eleven others for high treason took place at Monmouth on December 31, 1839, and the jury took only thirty minutes to find Frost guilty, although they did make a recommendation for mercy. Jones and Williams were also found guilty, five others changed their plea from not guilty to guilty and the remainder were found not guilty because there was a doubt if they had acted voluntarily. They were all sentenced to death by hanging, but there was a strong recommendation for mercy for all but the three leaders.⁶⁷

⁶⁵"Reports of State Trials 1839-1843," vol. IV, ed. John E.P. Wallis, London: Her Majesty's Stationery Office, 1892, pp. 85-98.

⁶⁶Ibid., p. 86.

⁶⁷Ibid., pp. 98-458.

On January 25, 1840, fifteen judges met at Westminster to hear Sir F. Pollock for Frost plead that it was not sufficient to deliver the list of witnesses ten days before the trial, but five days after the delivery of the copy of the indictment and the list of jurors. The judges agreed by a majority of nine to six that this was not a good delivery in point of law, but they also agreed by the same majority, that the objection to this delivery was not taken in due time, and had this been done, there would have been a postponement of the trial. Because of this difference of opinion the death sentence was changed to transportation for life.⁶⁸

Lord Francis Egerton, the Conservative M.P. for South Lancashire, felt strongly that if the Government had caused an unjust sentence to be imposed, or had prevented the granting of a pardon, then the proper course would have been to bring forward a motion of no-confidence. While the Government had the confidence of the House the prerogative of mercy should be left in the hands of the Queen's advisors. Duncombe, however, took the House to a division, whereupon his motion was soundly defeated.

⁶⁸ Ibid., pp. 462-479.

Ayes 31; Noes 196: Majority 165.

Those who supported the motion were:

H.A. Aglionby (Liberal - Cockermouth)
 P. Ainsworth (Liberal - Bolton)
 A. Bannerman (Liberal-Aberdeen)
 Hon. C. Barkeley (Liberal - Cheltenham)
 M.J. Blake (Liberal - Galway)
 Dr. Bowring (Chartist Radical - Bolton)
 Hon. W.N.R. Colborne (Liberal - Richmond)
 J. Collett (Liberal - Athlone)
 W. Collins (Liberal - Warwick)
 W.S. Crawford (Liberal - Rochdale)
 B. Disraeli (Conservative - Shrewsbury)
 G. Duncan (Liberal - Dundee)
 Adm. J. Dundas (Liberal - Greenwich)
 W. Ellis (Liberal - Leicester)
 B. Escott (Conservative - Winchester)
 R. Etwall (Liberal - Andover)
 Sir de L. Evans (Liberal - Westminster)
 J. Fielden (Chartist Radical - Oldham)
 T. Gisborne (Liberal - Nottingham)
 Sir B. Hall (Liberal - Marylebone)
 J. Hume (Chartist Radical - Montrose)
 W. James (Liberal - Cumberland)
 A. McCarthy (Liberal - Cork)
 J. Pattison (Liberal - London)
 Capt. Pechell (Liberal - Brighton)
 Capt. J.H. Plumridge (Liberal - Penryn and Falmouth)
 J.P. Somers (Liberal - Sligo)
 Sir G. Strickland (Liberal - Preston)
 E. Turner (Liberal - Truro)
 W. Williams (Liberal - Coventry)
 T. Wyse (Liberal - Waterford)

Tellers:

T.S. Duncombe (Chartist Radical - Finsbury)
 T. Wakley (Chartist Radical - Finsbury)⁶⁹

⁶⁹Hansard, Third Series, vol. 84, Tuesday, March 10, 1846, pp. 919-921.

Disraeli here is showing his willingness to stand against the majority of the Conservative Party. It is less easy to explain the decision of Escott, who had in other debates supported the Peel Ministry. These two Conservatives must have had strong feelings about the treatment of political prisoners.

Little more was heard of the Chartists in Parliament in 1846. In April, Duncombe moved an amendment to the Act relating to corresponding societies, and the licensing of lecture halls. As the law stood, anyone lecturing in a room not licensed annually by magistrates and taking admission money was liable to a £20 fine.⁷⁰ The role of the Chartist lecturers was of primary importance to the movement, for they probably made a greater contribution to the cause than the tracts and conventions. As Jones states so clearly, "The frenzied orator became the archetypal Chartist figure."⁷¹ They could not afford to have the law used against them, and in 1845 information had been laid against a Hull bookseller, who was convicted and fined.⁷² The Attorney General agreed not to oppose the introduction of such a bill.

In April too Caleb Powell, the Liberal M.P. for Limerick, drew the attention of the Home Secretary to an

⁷⁰Hansard, Third Series, vol. 85, Thursday, April 2, 1846, pp. 468-469.

⁷¹David Jones, Chartism and the Chartists, London: Penguin Books Ltd., 1975, p. 103.

⁷²Hansard, p. 469.

account in a Sheffield newspaper which claimed that "another cowardly attempt to intimidate and alarm respectable manufacturers of this town has taken place."⁷³ The Irish M.P. was using disturbances in the North of England to attack the Irish Coercion Bill. None of the Irish M.P.'s showed any interest in the affairs of the mainland. Their attention was focused solely on Ireland. John Parker, the Liberal M.P., stated that both he and Henry Ward, the cutlery town's other representative, had corresponded with the Home Office, and had been assured that everything possible would be done to put a stop to such outbreaks. He assured the House that the people of Sheffield were anxious for an example to be made of the offenders, because attacks on the property of manufacturers affected the stability and prosperity of the town's trade.⁷⁴

In May, during a debate on Lord Ashley's Ten Hours' Bill, Lord John Manners read an interesting quotation from Carlyle, which he understood to be a cry for a paternalistic form of government, but which seems to me to be a cry for a radical reform of the political system, which would bring about the politicization of the working classes. He quoted as follows:

The working classes cannot any longer go on
without government - without being actually guided

⁷³Ibid., Monday, April 27, 1846, pp. 1081-1082.

⁷⁴Ibid., p. 1083.

and governed. England cannot subsist in peace till, by some means or other, guidance and government for them is found.⁷⁵

Lord John then went on to say:

I accept this Bill as an earnest of good, paternal, patriarchal government for the future.⁷⁶

The Liberal Member for Tavistock, John Salisbury Trelawny, also felt that the working classes did not know what was best for them. At this time they were demanding shorter working hours, whereas once they had asked for universal suffrage as the panacea for all their ills. Millions had petitioned for the adoption of the Charter without foreseeing what might be the ultimate consequences if the Charter became law, just as now they could not see the future consequences of the Ten Hours Bill.⁷⁷ Such comments were typical of the elitism shown in this Parliament, which was a tremendous impediment to the Chartist cause. There was a tangible distaste for ordinary people and for popular culture, which erected a barrier to Chartist aims. One can see from comments such as this that the majority of the Commons was not sympathetic to the feelings of the ordinary people, and was not prepared to respond to them. There was little interaction between Parliament and the people; Parliament was always ready to be critical but not sympathetic. Apart from the Chartist Radicals, the Chartists were without spokesmen in the House of Commons, and in the Lords there

⁷⁵Hansard, Third Series, vol. 86, Wednesday, May 13, 1846, p. 504.

⁷⁶Ibid. ⁷⁷Ibid.

was only the eccentric Brougham who was prepared to plead their cause. Consequently, they had little hope of success.

On June 25, 1846 the Government was defeated on the second reading of the Protection of Life (Ireland) Bill, and on June 29, Peel's ministry resigned. A Whig ministry under Lord John Russell took over, with Sir George Grey as Home Secretary. Parliament was prorogued in August and did not meet again until January 19, 1847. The new Secretary of State was a good administrator, and according to his biographer, Mandell Creighton, he shared with his Prime Minister confidence in the "good sense of the working classes."⁷⁸

In July, 1847 Parliament was dissolved, a general election took place, and Feargus O'Connor was elected as the Chartist Member for the borough of Nottingham. In the 1851 census it was recorded that this borough had a population of 57,407 and a registered electorate of 5,260. O'Connor polled 1,257 votes, and John Walter, Jr. was returned as the Conservative M.P. for the borough. The latter polled 1,683;⁷⁹ he was the son of John Walter, who had received Chartist backing when he won Nottingham in the by-election of April 1841, and who had consequently been unseated for bribery in April 1843. Walter, Senior, had died just prior to the 1847

⁷⁸Mandell Creighton, Memoir of Sir George Grey, preface by Sir Edward Grey, London, New York: Longman, Green & Co., 1901, p. 47.

⁷⁹Charles R. Dod, Electoral Facts 1832-1833 Impartially Stated, Brighton: Harvester Press, 1972, p. 236.

election, and his son took over as proprietor of The Times and candidate for Nottingham.⁸⁰

The Whigs remained in Downing Street with Lord John Russell as Prime Minister and Sir George Grey at the Home Office. This was a good combination to deal with the Chartist disturbances which were to come in 1848. Russell was a tolerant man, and Grey a good administrator who believed that the working classes had good common sense.

Of the original group of Chartist Radicals, Attwood did not run in the general election as he had accepted the Chiltern Hundreds in January 1840, and had been replaced by G.F. Muntz. Leader did not run, and Hume still represented Montrose but was not named as a Chartist supporter. It would appear therefore that the Chartist Radical strength in the House of Commons was increased to eleven.

The National Registration and Central Election Committee of the Chartist movement resolved at a meeting held in Soho on July 30, 1847:

... that the following gentlemen, having pledged themselves to the principles of the People's Charter, our friends in the several cities and boroughs for which they are candidates, are requested to give them an earnest and cordial support:-

Finsbury	-	T.S. Duncombe,* T. Wakley*
Oldham	-	J. Fielden, Halliday
Rochdale	-	W.S. Crawford*
Coventry	-	W. Williams
Nottingham	-	F. O'Connor*
Blackburn	-	W.P. Roberts
Marylebone	-	D.W. Harvey
Tower Hamlets	-	George Thompson**

⁸⁰Ward, p. 160.

Halifax	-	E. Jones, E. Miall
Derby	-	Philip McGrath
Bradford	-	Colonel Thompson*
Leeds	-	Joseph Sturge
Sheffield	-	Thomas Clark
Tiverton	-	G. Julian Harney
Ipswich	-	Henry Vincent
Worcester	-	J. Hardy
Norwich	-	W. Simpson
Bolton	-	Dr. Bowring*
Birmingham	-	G.F. Muntz*, W. Scholefield* and John Williams** [ran for Macclesfield] ⁸¹

Ten of the men named on this list as Chartist supporters took their seats when Parliament met on November 23, 1847. Eight of them had run under the name of Liberal, and only O'Connor and John Williams had stood as Chartists, and were listed as such in Dod's Electoral Facts.

Macclesfield, a Cheshire town, which was a centre of the silk industry, had shown signs of increasing Chartist sympathies. At an Anti-Corn Law meeting there in June 1841, John West, a Chartist, spoke at length on the dangerous effects of free trade, and a resolution in favour of free trade was defeated.⁸² When Duncombe presented the National Petition in 1842, he named Macclesfield as one of the areas which had contributed more than 10,000 signatures.⁸³ In the 1847 election the results were as follows:-

*Elected. +Newcomers.

⁸¹ Northern Star, 24 July 1847.

⁸² Lucy Brown, "The Chartists and the Anti-Corn Law League," Chartist Studies, ed. Asa Briggs, London: MacMillan and Co. Ltd., 1959, p. 362.

⁸³ Read, p. 52.

John Brocklehurst (Lib.)	598
John Williams (Chartist)	500 ⁸⁴
Thomas Grimsditch (Cons.)	428

The others who ran under the Chartist banner met with varying success. In Blackburn W.P. Roberts polled 509 votes, only 71 fewer than W. Eccles, who was returned as one of the two Liberal members.⁸⁵ In Derby two Liberals were elected, and Philip McGrath, the Chartist candidate, received 216 votes out of 2,748 cast.⁸⁶ Ernest C. Jones who ran for Halifax, received only 37 votes, and two Liberal M.P.'s were elected.⁸⁷ In Ipswich, a Protectionist and a Liberal were elected, and Henry Vincent, the Chartist candidate, polled 546 out of 2,744 votes cast.⁸⁸ In Marylebone the Chartist candidate, Robert Owen, polled only one vote.⁸⁹ In Northampton Dr. Epps came at the bottom of the poll with 140 votes. A Chartist, Peter McDouall, had run in this shoe-manufacturing town in the 1841 general election and he too had come at the bottom of the poll with 176 votes. In the 1852 general election, the Chartist candidate again came bottom of the poll, with still fewer votes, only 106.⁹⁰ In Sheffield Thomas Clark polled 326 votes, and came far behind the two Liberals who were returned.⁹¹ In Stockport John West polled 14 votes,⁹² and in Tiverton George Harney did not get a single

⁸⁴Dod, p. 201. ⁸⁵Ibid., p. 27. ⁸⁶Ibid., p. 81.

⁸⁷Ibid., p. 136. ⁸⁸Ibid., p. 155. ⁸⁹Ibid., p. 209.

⁹⁰Ibid., p. 230. ⁹¹Ibid., p. 281. ⁹²Ibid., p. 296.

vote.⁹³ The election results did not reflect any great Chartist revival. However, with the verbose O'Connor in the Commons more was sure to be heard of the Chartist cause in the coming session.

When Parliament re-assembled in November 1847, it was noted in the speech from the Throne that in spite of a good harvest, there was still distress in the country, especially in the manufacturing towns, as economic times were poor, and trade and commerce in a slump.⁹⁴ This was an indication that Chartism could once more provide a vehicle for the expression of the pent-up grievances of those in distress. It is interesting to note, however, that O'Connor's maiden speech dealt with the condition of Ireland, not England. He spoke against absentee landlords and the Irish Coercion Bill.⁹⁵

As the depression continued through the winter of 1847-48, the interest in Chartism grew once more. Another petition was prepared; another convention elected to meet in London in April 1848; crowds turned out to lectures on O'Connor's Land Company, and Chartists continued to make contact with Irish agitators.

O'Connor had long extolled the virtues of life on the land and the economic possibilities of smallholdings. The National Land Company was set up in December 1846, but was

⁹³Ibid., p. 315.

⁹⁴Hansard, Third Series, vol. 95, Tuesday, November 23, 1847, pp. 12-14.

⁹⁵Ibid., p. 141.

only provisionally registered. O'Connor found that registration under the Joint Stock Companies Act was very expensive and therefore tried to get the benefits of the Friendly Societies Acts for his company.⁹⁶ Petitions were presented to the Commons in February and March and on March 16, 1848 O'Connor tried to bring in a bill to amend the Friendly Societies Act. He hoped to bring within the scope of the Act societies formed to purchase land and to erect on it "dwellings to be allotted to members of the Society, together with certain portions of such land for agricultural purposes . . ." for he believed this would rescue the savings of the poor from "the gin palace and the beer shop."⁹⁷

Sir George Grey, the Home Secretary, however, stated categorically that he considered the Land Plan to be a lottery, and if O'Connor was asking the Government to legalize lotteries he would oppose the measure.⁹⁸ The bill was never given a second reading, and instead, at the end of May, the House appointed a Select Committee, which eventually declared the company to be illegal, and on July 30, the Committee reported that registration was impossible.

Excitement for the Charter was once again in the air, however, and when the forty-nine delegates from

⁹⁶ Joy MacAskill, "The Chartist Land Plan," Chartist Studies, ed. Asa Briggs, London: MacMillan and Co. Ltd., 1959, pp. 309-311 [see appendix D].

⁹⁷ Hansard, Third Series, vol. 97, Thursday, March 16, 1848, pp. 692-697.

⁹⁸ Ibid., p. 698.

thirty-six towns met at the Convention in London, many of the delegates gave reports of growing tensions, and some advocated physical force. The Government began to be seriously concerned when they got word that a monster meeting was being planned for April 10.

On April 6, Sir John Benn Walsh, the Protectionist Member for Radnorshire, asked the Home Secretary what information he had received about the proposed Chartist meeting to be held on Kennington Common on April 10, and what measures the Government was prepared to take to prevent the House "from being overawed by any meeting calculated to intimidate" it.⁹⁹ Grey, in reply, showed the House a notice informing the people of the coming demonstration and telling those who wished to take part to assemble on the Common, and prescribing a route by which the marchers should proceed to the House to present the National Petition. The Government had directed a notice to be issued, declaring such a procession to be illegal and warning all "loyal and peaceable" subjects to abstain from taking part.¹⁰⁰

O'Connor rose to express his surprise that such a procession should be declared illegal, and reminded the House of earlier marches which had been allowed. The people involved had pledged to keep the peace and to take into custody anyone who violated property rights. He believed that the

⁹⁹Hansard, Third Series, vol. 97, Thursday, April 6, 1848, p. 1353.

¹⁰⁰Ibid., p. 1354.

Home Secretary should reconsider his decision, and the people should be allowed to present their petition.¹⁰¹ Joseph Hume, the Chartist Radical Montrose M.P., felt that it might be dangerous to interfere with the procession, and that no matter how many people participated, he did not think it was illegal so long as it was peaceable and quiet. He too advised the Government to rescind its decision¹⁰² - to no avail.

O'Connor was again on his feet, asking for a pardon for the Newport rioters and other political prisoners. In his speech he reminded the House that a similar motion had been defeated on May 25, 1841 only by the casting vote of the Speaker. He also implied that Government spies had been employed in Lancaster and York in an attempt to entrap Chartists. At Chartist meetings a man "having a glazed hat" had displayed placards inciting the people to revolt and to assist the Newport men. He laboured to keep the attention of the House from the inflammatory speeches of some of the Convention delegates, and reports of an Irish conspiracy. O'Connor begged the Government to make a concession to public opinion, but he ruined the good effect of his speech by casting a slur on Lord John Russell, who was not in the House to defend himself. O'Connor implied that Lord John was opposed to a pardon because he bore a grudge against Frost, who, it had been rumoured, was planning to run against him in the 1837 election in Stroud.¹⁰³ The Home Secretary

¹⁰¹ Ibid., pp. 1354-1355. ¹⁰² Ibid., p. 1355.

¹⁰³ Ibid., pp. 1369-1373.

pointed out that the 1841 motion could not have applied to Frost, Williams and Jones who had been transported, and that a motion similar to the present one had been defeated by 196 votes in 1846. Grey also ridiculed the idea that the Prime Minister had acted against Frost because of a jealous fear that he might beat him in an election.¹⁰⁴

Charles Morgan, the Protectionist M.P. for Monmouthshire, made two points against the motion. If the prisoners had only planned to persuade the magistrates to relax the severity of the treatment being meted out to Vincent in Monmouth Gaol, why had they marched on Newport at 2:00 A.M. in the company of armed men on a wild and stormy night? Secondly, if there had been a government spy sent to Newport to incite the people to violence, then why had this not been brought up in favour of the prisoners at their trial.¹⁰⁵

Joseph Hume considered that the men had been illegally convicted and sentenced, and were now illegally detained. He stated that England and Russia stood alone in withholding an amnesty from political prisoners.¹⁰⁶ Henry Aglionby felt that O'Connor's motion was too vague,¹⁰⁷ and Thomas Wakley pointed out that if these men had succeeded, they would have been heroes, not criminals. The working classes felt strongly that the Newport Rebels had been illegally convicted, and after the way these unrepresented citizens had persevered in

¹⁰⁴Ibid., pp. 1373-1380. ¹⁰⁵Ibid., p. 1381.

¹⁰⁶Ibid. ¹⁰⁷Ibid.

making their wishes known, the House should treat their petition with due respect.¹⁰⁸

Lt. Colonel T.P. Thompson, the Liberal Member for Bradford, supported the motion for leniency, for he felt that the Government would be strengthened by such a move.¹⁰⁹ The Radical Rochdale M.P., William Sharman, agreed that it was the deep desire of the workers to see Frost, Williams and Jones pardoned,¹¹⁰ and John Bowring, the Chartist Radical Member for Bolton, also said that he would support the motion in accordance with the wishes of such large numbers of citizens.¹¹¹

It is interesting to note that Joseph Hume, although not named by the Chartist election committee as a supporter of the movement, still continued to give the movement his support in Parliament (see p. 214). Indeed, he supported the Chartist cause with his vote not just his words, in three divisions which concerned Chartism, and which have been mentioned in this chapter.

The Solicitor General, Sir David Dundee, held that this was no time to relax the penalties for people convicted of high treason.¹¹² Richard Gardner, the Liberal Member for Leicester, disagreed, especially since this motion was supported by large numbers of the unrepresented.¹¹³ When

¹⁰⁸Ibid., pp. 1381-1382. ¹⁰⁹Ibid., pp. 1382-1383.

¹¹⁰Ibid., p. 1383. ¹¹¹Ibid.

¹¹²Ibid., pp. 1384-1390. ¹¹³Ibid., p. 1390.

the House divided, however, only twenty-three M.P.'s supported O'Connor's motion, and it was defeated by sixty-eight votes:

Ayes 23; Noes 91: Majority 68. Those who supported O'Connor were:-

H.A. Aglionby (Liberal - Cocker-mouth)
 R.J. Blewitt (Liberal - Monmouth)
 Dr. Bowring (Chartist Radical - Bolton)
 J. Clay (Liberal - Kingston upon Hull)
 W. Collins (Liberal - Warwick)
 W.S. Crawford (Liberal - Rochdale)
 W. Ewart (Liberal - Dumfries)
 W.J. Fox (Liberal - Oldham)
 R. Gardner (Liberal - Leicester)
 Sir B. Hall (Liberal - Marylebone)
 C. Hindley (Liberal - Ashton under Lyne)
 J. Hume (Chartist Radical - Montrose)
 T. Meagher (Liberal - Waterford)
 Capt. Pechell (Liberal - Brighton)
 J. Pilkington (Liberal - Blackburn)
 Col. H. Salwey (Liberal - Ludlow)
 W. Scholefield (Chartist Radical - Birmingham)
 Lord D. Stuart (Liberal - Marylebone)
 Col. T.P. Thompson (Liberal - Bradford)
 G. Thompson (Liberal - Tower Hamlets)
 E. Turner (Liberal - Truro)
 Sir J. Walmsley (Liberal - Leicester)
 J. Williams (Chartist - Macclesfield)

Tellers:

F. O'Connor (Chartist - Nottingham)
 T. Wakley (Chartist Radical - Finsbury)¹¹⁴

It is interesting to note that in the three division lists given in this chapter, Wakley, Hume and Bowring, designated by me as Chartist Radicals, cast a vote in all three. Fielden and Duncombe voted in two and Scholefield and Ward in one. Attwood and Leader were, of course, no longer in Parliament. None of the Chartist Radicals voted against these motions, which could be described as favourable

¹¹⁴ Ibid.

to the Chartist cause. Of the newly elected Chartist supporters, Crawford, Col. Thompson, George Thompson and Williams all supported O'Connor's motion. Only the Birmingham M.P., G.F. Muntz, failed to give him his support. The Radical campaign in favour of Frost, Williams and Jones seems to have been designed to keep attention away from what some of the hotheads at the Chartist Convention were advocating, and also to whip up enthusiasm for the Charter amongst the rank and file parliamentarians. This cause, too, would give the ordinary people a legitimate grievance to become excited about, and it was important for the Chartist movement to have a good show of support for the presentation of the petition, though there could have been little hope of impressing an elitist Parliament.

Henry Drummond, the Liberal-Conservative M.P. for West Surrey asked what the Chartists planned to do if the Commons refused to receive their petition, and how O'Connor would deal with the subjects the petition addressed if no discussion were permitted at the time of presentation. O'Connor explained that the Prime Minister, feeling that the petition deserved every consideration, had given permission for the motion to be brought forward on April 15, 1845.¹¹⁵ The Commons continued to discuss the ambiguity of the Government's ban, and the Home Secretary defended the

¹¹⁵Ibid., vol. 98, Friday, April 7, 1848, pp. 4-5.

Government's stand. Grey stated that if the Chartist procession was organized in order to terrorize and alarm, it would be illegal; likewise if it were to present the petition to Parliament with an excessive number of people, it would be illegal.¹¹⁶ After further questioning Grey claimed that all the information he had was in the notice published by the Chartist Association, which said that "O'Connor is to marshall the people in order that a grand demonstration of physical force may accompany the petition to the door of this House."¹¹⁷ After pressure from O'Connor, Grey admitted that his Under-Secretary had received a deputation from the Chartist National Convention in the presence of the Attorney General. The deputation had left a letter assuring him that it repudiated armed meetings and would not encourage disturbances.¹¹⁸ Grey then assured the irate Sir Harry Inglis that this deputation had not been received in the capacity of national representatives, but merely as private citizens.¹¹⁹

Thomas Wakley warned the House that 500,000 people would probably attend the Kennington Common meeting, which caused some laughter in the House from those who considered it an exaggeration. Wakley pointed out that these people had probably got their information, as he had, from "a public newspaper owned by a Member," the Northern Star by implication. Ordinary people who read the account would presume that a

¹¹⁶Ibid., pp. 6-7. ¹¹⁷Ibid., p. 8. ¹¹⁸Ibid., p. 9.

¹¹⁹Ibid.

lawyer and an M.P. would understand the law. He felt, therefore, that the Government should have acted sooner to let the people know that they were acting illegally, and that he was fearful that there would be a "calamity."¹²⁰

O'Connor denied attending any public meetings to arrange the Chartist procession, although he admitted that he was a delegate at the Chartist Convention. He claimed that the people were only petitioning for rights promised to them by the Liberals, who had maintained that taxation without representation was tyranny. He promised that he would ensure that the peace was not disturbed. He also told the Commons that his life had been threatened if he participated in the demonstration, although he did not intend to let the threat deter him.¹²¹

The Chartist threat to property seemed a very serious and urgent matter to the parliamentarians, so there was an unusually spirited response to the subject of Chartism in the Commons. Sir James Graham, who was the Home Secretary in the Peel ministry, pointed out two differences between the presentation of the 1842 Chartist Petition and the 1848 presentation. In 1842 the petition came from a private house, not from an open public meeting, and there was no announced intention of coming to the House of Commons to present the petition. Graham felt that he would have failed in his duty to maintain the peace if he had consented to a meeting such

¹²⁰ Ibid.; pp. 10-11. ¹²¹ Ibid.; pp. 11-13.

as the one announced for Kennington Common, and he was glad that the present Government would not countenance it.¹²²

Edward Horsman, the Liberal Member for Cockermouth, felt that Graham was implying that the present Government was imposing greater restrictions on petitioners than the Conservative Government had done. He pointed out that circumstances were different, and that the announcement of the intended procession had caused great apprehension. M.P.'s were anxious and Londoners were fearful. O'Connor had offered to guarantee the peace, but no one could answer for 50,000 men.¹²³

Alderman William Thompson, the Westmoreland Protectionist Member, rose to support the Cockermouth M.P. and to attack O'Connor. He denied that he was the man who had provided the information that O'Connor would be shot if he attended the procession, and he was surprised that O'Connor had denied taking part in any meeting to arrange the procession. He asked O'Connor if he had attended a meeting at Cartwright's Coffee House in Cripplegate on April 3, and the Chartist M.P. admitted that he had, but claimed that it had been only a tea party attended by forty people - hardly a credible explanation.

Thompson claimed that this had been a meeting of the leading Chartists, and the language which O'Connor had used was "not calculated to allay alarm and promote peace and good

¹²²Ibid., pp. 13-14. ¹²³Ibid., pp. 14-15.

order." Thompson also said he had obtained a report of O'Connor's speech to the Irish Confederate Democratic Society in which the Chartist had stated that it was no use petitioning Parliament any longer; they must do as the Americans did - shake off the yoke. The people of Ireland must have an independent republic, that they ought to do away with all titles and with Royalty, but that moral force was sufficient.¹²⁴

O'Connor denied this report, and stressed that he had always been against the republican form of government. He pointed out that even this report admitted that he advocated moral force as opposed to physical force. He denied mentioning the topics that Thompson had enumerated, and said that those who had attended the tea party would give evidence to support his denial.¹²⁵ Joseph Hume pointed out that the press had often misquoted speeches, and hoped that Thompson would produce a shorthand report, and not just accuse an M.P. on "loose information." He considered that a Select Committee should be set up to question the people involved, because he was fearful that there might be spies abroad.¹²⁶

The prospect of the destruction of property in his own constituency brought Sir De Lacy Evans, the Liberal M.P. for Westminster, to his feet. There had already been two similar meetings in his area which had caused his constituents "alarm and terror." Merchants had suffered materially, both

¹²⁴Ibid., pp. 15-16. ¹²⁵Ibid., p. 16.

¹²⁶Ibid., pp. 16-17.

before and after the meetings, and he felt that it was his duty to ask the Government to protect his constituents from losses which they were ill able to bear.¹²⁷

Lord John Russell said that the Liberal Government felt it necessary to declare the procession illegal and to warn the people not to attend. He believed there was ample time for O'Connor to call off the procession and to tell his followers that their petition would be respectfully heard, and there would be an opportunity for discussion.¹²⁸ Although Chartism was weaker than it had been in 1842, from the Government's point of view it had become more important because in this year of revolution abroad, the internal situation in England was being carefully watched, and vice versa. The anticipation of a Chartist outbreak encouraged revolutionaries, and also weakened Britain's diplomatic bargaining power.

In 1848 Chartism had been linked with Irish discontent, which was the Whigs' main problem.¹²⁹ Although Lord John Russell still did not fear Chartism, he did now fear the effect that any breakdown in law and order might have on revolutionary Europe or on Ireland. Peel agreed that the Government was justified in taking precautions because of the situation abroad and in Ireland.¹³⁰

¹²⁷ Ibid., pp. 17-18. ¹²⁸ Ibid., pp. 18-19.

¹²⁹ F.C. Mather, "The Government and the Chartists," Chartist Studies, ed. Asa Briggs, London: MacMillan & Co. Ltd., 1959, p. 394.

¹³⁰ Hansard, pp. 19-20.

The House then went on to discuss the security of the Crown in the light of a seditious plan in Ireland to establish an independent republic. Sir George Grey quoted from the United Irishmen extracts from a speech by Devin Reilly who said: "A great movement of the people was passing over the world . . . 300,000 Englishmen, Chartists, would assemble in London next week, and then they would have London in their hands." Grey wished that O'Connor had shown Reilly that he was mistaken in his belief, but O'Connor insisted that he had never read Reilly's speech.¹³¹

On the day of the Kennington Common meeting, the Marquess of Northampton in the Lords, questioned the Lord President of the Council, and was assured that there was no reason for alarm because the meeting had been dispersed by the police without any bloodshed or help from the military. The petition had been brought quietly to the Commons in taxicabs, had been duly received, and there had been no interference with the right of petition. Lord Brougham agreed that the right of petition and public meetings for discussion must be upheld, but he believed that such "monster meetings," designed as exhibitions of physical force to intimidate the Government and to force it to pass certain measures, were illegal. He also thought that people who attended such meetings put themselves into a position where "without any will or intention of their own, they may be driven . . . into illegal courses."¹³² Again there is the implication

¹³¹ Ibid., pp. 25-26. ¹³² Ibid., pp. 70-71.

that the ordinary people can be easily manipulated, and a disbelief in their agency. In the past Brougham had supported the Chartists, but he obviously disapproved of any attempt to coerce Parliament.

The Duke of Wellington, who had been recalled from retirement to protect London from the Chartist threat, then spoke of the paralysis of trade and business and the fear of the Londoners. He hoped that measures would be passed to limit the size of meetings, but if such monster meetings were to be allowed, then the citizens should be armed to defend both life and property. He wished to assure the House that the army was ready to give any support that the preservation of law and safety might call for. Northampton then complimented the Government on the precautions they had taken, and praised the middle classes for "the spirit of order, religion and morality" which they had displayed. He felt as long as that spirit prevailed in England there was no danger of revolt.¹³³

Langdowne said that the Government had received support from the majority of the people, and that all classes could be counted on to uphold law and order. The Marquess of Londonderry hoped that if there was any repetition of such events, the Government should pay attention to the large number of foreigners in the country¹³⁴ - a typically right-wing comment when much of Europe was in turmoil.

¹³³Ibid., pp. 71-73.

¹³⁴Ibid., p. 73.

Meanwhile, in the Commons, during debate on the second reading of the Crown and Government Security Bill, William Smith O'Brien, Liberal M.P. for Limerick, who two months later was found guilty of high treason and lost the seat which he had held since 1835, rose to speak. In discussing Chartist support for Ireland he said:

... amongst the Chartists there is scarce an individual who does not sympathize with the cause of Ireland. They feel that they have been unjustly excluded from all share in political power; they are resolved that the working classes shall assert their right to a share in the representation of this country; and they know they cannot do so at a better time than when you are embarrassed in your arrangements with Ireland.¹³⁵

Sir George Grey rejected O'Brien's claim that the Chartists supported the Irish, and pointed out that O'Connor, who was seated next to O'Brien, had declared himself the firm friend of monarchy. O'Connor then rose to say that there had been a peaceful demonstration that day, but he warned Grey that if he suppressed the free expression of public opinion, then he would cause secret clubs and associations to be formed.¹³⁶

George Thompson, the Radical Member for Tower Hamlets, expressed relief that the Chartist demonstration had been orderly, and that the people had used peaceful means to attain their just rights. He believed that all should have constitutional rights, and this bill before the House would make it a felony to think and speak about political matters.

¹³⁵Ibid., pp. 75-76. ¹³⁶Ibid., pp. 83-84.

He went on to accuse the Prime Minister of promulgating the doctrine of finality, and refusing to extend political rights to all of the people. The military preparations the Government had made when the people had announced that they would meet on Kennington Common, would not be necessary in a country which was wisely and justly governed.¹³⁷ These people believed that they had justice on their side, otherwise they could never have been persuaded by O'Connor. Here at least was one Member of the Commons who did believe in the free will of the people. He was in favour of the people gathering together to assert their political rights, and pointed out that the poor and uneducated had only one way to plead and that was by presenting themselves in large numbers before those who had deprived them of their rights. Thompson opposed the bill to deprive them of the right to declare their opinions, and called it a "gagging law." He too warned that if such a bill were passed, secret societies would multiply.¹³⁸

Sir Benjamin Hall, the Liberal Member for Marylebone, quoted from O'Connor's letter which was published in the Northern Star on April 1, in which he had said "... let the power behind the Throne be greater than the Throne itself." O'Connor suggested that labour should elect its representative annually and pay him. He wrote: "Let the people be the base and the superstructure."¹³⁹ Sir Benjamin feared that

¹³⁷ Ibid., pp. 85-88.

¹³⁸ Ibid., pp. 87-89.

¹³⁹ Ibid., pp. 89-90.

the people would "mistake licence for liberty," and cautioned that because some changes were needed the whole structure of society should not be thrown out. He was prepared for some reforms to keep the people quiet, but the system should not be altered. He was sure that the people desired law and order above all else.¹⁴⁰

The Chartist Radical, Hume, criticized the Government for passing such a severe law to deal with a temporary emergency. He considered such a response to be an over-reaction, which would be regretted later. The people had demanded an extension of their political rights, but the Government had responded by curtailing their freedom of speech. He felt that public meetings allowed people to express their frustrations and vent their anger without causing violence.¹⁴¹ The Protectionist, Inglis, however, felt that the ordinary people were being manipulated by "inflammable and excited myriads," who incited them to crime with their oratory.¹⁴² This was a stereotype of the common people which prevented many of the parliamentarians from understanding their actions and demands.

Some of the Chartist supporters tried to bring more positive views before the Commons. Aglionby pointed out that much was said at Chartist meetings that was highly credible,¹⁴³ and Dr. Bowring urged that this was no time to widen the breach between classes.¹⁴⁴ Again, however, the idea of the

¹⁴⁰ Ibid., pp. 91-92. ¹⁴¹ Ibid., pp. 92-96.

¹⁴² Ibid., pp. 99-100. ¹⁴³ Ibid., p. 105.

¹⁴⁴ Ibid., p. 108.

conspiracy theory was aired, this time by the Liberal M.P. for the city of Oxford, William Page Ward. He mocked the fury of Chartist orators, whom he termed the "forcible feebles," but feared that there was a quiet intelligence at work behind them.¹⁴⁵ The common people were not considered able enough to have ideas of their own, so how could they play a significant role in history. They were seen as passive victims being manipulated by a secret group of people with a superior intellect.

Henry Drummond, the Liberal-Conservative Member for West Surrey stated that he did not connect the Irish disturbances with those in London, although all were phases of "the same malady which pervades all Europe." He quoted from a Chartist speech which claimed that the time had come to "get rid of kings and priests whom our forefathers in their ignorance deemed it necessary to make governors." In the same speech, he went on to declare that the profits from improved machinery went to the free-trade capitalists, while the working classes were just burdened with increased taxation. The working classes mistakenly thought they could improve their condition by reducing the manufacturers' profits, and Drummond criticized those who tried to bring them into conflict with their employers. In particular, Drummond named O'Connor, and supported the Government's right to govern.¹⁴⁶

The Prime Minister assured the House that freedom of speech and the press would continue, but "some reckless men

¹⁴⁵Ibid., pp. 109-111. ¹⁴⁶Ibid., pp. 113-116.

will be checked in their careers of excitement." He criticized schemes which promised the workers Utopia, and presented the ruling class as the embodiment of a system which would protect the workers, and which upheld the values requisite for a good life.¹⁴⁷

Peargus O'Connor, of course, opposed the Crown and Government Security Bill, and gave his first-hand account of the dispersal of the Chartist meeting.¹⁴⁸ He was supported by Hume, who maintained that the meeting dissolved without any police interference, that the Government's military preparations had been quite unnecessary, and that the Bill was unnecessary as the Government already possessed enough powers. This brought the irascible Colonel Sibthorp, Protectionist M.P. for Lincoln, to his feet to thank the Government for the firm course they had taken. He suggested that Hume should be imprisoned in the Tower for life, and that some of the leaders of the Kennington Common meeting should be ducked in the Thames and sent home in wet clothes as a punishment for trying to disturb the peace and alarm the public.¹⁴⁹

The Government was also supported by Henry Gratton, the Liberal M.P. for County Meath, who approved their measures to protect London, while opposing the Bill because he believed that it was adopting a wrong course towards Ireland.¹⁵⁰ Sir de Lacy Evans thought that the actions of the Government and

¹⁴⁷ Ibid., pp. 125-127. ¹⁴⁸ Ibid., pp. 155-156.

¹⁴⁹ Ibid., Tuesday, April 11, 1848, pp. 157-158.

¹⁵⁰ Ibid., p. 158.

of Londoners had made the Chartist meeting contemptible. The Government's actions in protecting the city were defended by law and order supporters on both sides of the House.

The debate continued on April 12, 1848, and George Thompson accused the Government of raving against the Chartists and the working classes, and praising the middle classes. He accused the Whig ministry of trying to set one class against the other. He claimed that the Chartists were trustworthy, intelligent and loyal. The Government had made no concessions to their just demands, but were passing an unconstitutional bill to deprive them of their rights. Those who had assembled in Kennington Common were only a fraction of those in the country. They were "the men who made the Members of this House what they were - the creators of their luxury - the men without whom the country would be nothing¹⁵¹ yet they were being branded as traitors by this bill. They petitioned the House on the same grounds as the American colonists had done - no taxation without representation, and the Chartists were far more numerous.¹⁵²

O'Connor spoke again in opposition to the Bill, but on April 13, Thomas Thorneley, Liberal Member for Wolverhampton, and Chairman of the Committee on Petitions, presented a special report to the House. He announced that the alleged 5,700,000 signatures on the Chartist Petition actually totalled 1,975,496, and included "Victoria Rex, April 1st,

¹⁵¹ Ibid., Wednesday, April 12, 1848, pp. 224-225.

¹⁵² Ibid., p. 226.

F.M. Duke of Wellington and Sir Robert Peel." Other signatures included: "No Cheese, Pig Nose, Flat Nose and so on."¹⁵³ The Petition and O'Connor lost all credence.

O'Connor blustered that thirteen lawyers' clerks could not have counted the signatures, that government spies could have inserted the false signatures, and that he stood by his original estimate of the number of signatures.¹⁵⁴ Thornely assured him that the petition had been treated respectfully, that the signatures had been very carefully counted, and it had even been weighed.¹⁵⁵

No M.P. was prepared to support O'Connor. Lord John Russell stated that the Committee had the full confidence of the House. The Earl of Arundel and Surrey, who was the Member for Arundel, further ridiculed the Chartist leadership, and accused them of exaggerating the numbers who had taken part in the demonstration. They claimed that a quarter of a million had been present on Kennington Common, but his sources assured him that the number of spectators never exceeded 25,000. John O'Connell, Liberal M.P. for Bimerick and a supporter of Repeal of the Union, stated that no Repealers had taken part in the demonstration, as they would not get involved with an agitation where violence was used.¹⁵⁶

The Protectionist, Inglis, felt that the exaggeration of numbers, and the falsifying of signatures proved that the

¹⁵³Ibid., Thursday, April 13, 1848, pp. 284-285.

¹⁵⁴Ibid., p. 286. ¹⁵⁵Ibid., pp. 286-287.

¹⁵⁶Ibid., pp. 287-288.

Chartist petition was "hardly worth the paper on which it was written." He added that those who made such false claim and committed such abuses were "the real and worst enemies of the right of petitioning." He also hoped that the Government would take steps to prevent such demonstrations as O'Connor had arranged for Kennington Common, though "... the physical force which was wielded by the Hon. Member, was about in proportion to the moral-force value of the petition which he had presented."¹⁵⁷

William Cripps, the Liberal-Conservative Member for Cirencester, rose to defend the Committee. He ridiculed O'Connor's "audacious statement" that the petition was signed by 5,000,000, and that it weighed five tons. He did not want to throw "ridicule and obloquy upon the petition, but he did throw ridicule and obloquy upon the Hon. Gentleman who presented it." The Member for Nottingham had forfeited the right to be believed in the future. Cripps hoped that measures would be taken to prevent any further meetings to concoct "such a ribald mass of obscenity and impiety as was contained in the petition" which contained words "which the vilest strumpet in the street would blush to name."

He went on to point out that the Duke of Wellington's name occurred fifteen or sixteen times, the name of the Arch-Tory M.P. for Lincoln, Col. Sibthorp several times, as well as those of the Members for Manchester and West Yorkshire. On one of the sheets he knew was written: "We could not get

¹⁵⁷ Ibid., pp. 288-290.

paid for any more today." He only wished he had looked at the petition sheets when they were tabled, so that he could have objected to the receipt of the petition.¹⁵⁸

O'Connor immediately rose to defend himself against this attack on his veracity, and stalked out of the House. He then sent Ernest Jones to challenge Cripps to a duel. Joseph Hume criticized Cripps for taking such a course, and both him and O'Connor for their unbecoming behaviour. He recommended that it should be made quite clear to the country that every M.P. was responsible for the petitions he presented, and that M.P.'s should take care to see that petitions were genuine. Mr. Redhead York, the Liberal Member for York, disagreed with Hume. He believed that: "Truth in this House should be paramount," and Cripps had spoken only the truth, and although he had used strong language, the House should be grateful.¹⁵⁹

After the intervention of many M.P.'s, Cripps made a statement that he would not retract anything he had said about O'Connor, but regretted if he had used any unparliamentary language. This satisfied the Speaker.¹⁶⁰ O'Connor was arrested by the Sergeant-at-Arms and brought before the Commons to assure the Members that he did not intend to take any hostile action against Cripps.¹⁶¹ The matter ceased there, and any impression that the Petition might have made

¹⁵⁸Ibid., pp. 290-292. ¹⁵⁹Ibid., pp. 293-294.

¹⁶⁰Ibid., pp. 298-299. ¹⁶¹Ibid., p. 299.

upon the House was lost amidst the welter of ridicule and farce. Certainly, the Commons was unimpressed by O'Connor's bluster, and one gets the impression that many M.P.'s may well have been glad to have this opportunity to question his veracity. The Chartist Petition was undoubtedly dead.

O'Connor was not to be put down, and on the following day, he attacked the Crown and Government Security Bill as a suspension of habeas corpus. He also attacked the press for being anti-Chartist, and accused it of misrepresenting reports of Chartist meetings. His speech was quite violent, and he assured the Commons that if the Bill became law he would crisscross the country crying: "Down with the base, bloody, and brutal Whigs."¹⁶²

By April 18, 1848, when O'Connor again spoke against the Bill, he had calmed down. He admitted that after the violent language which preceded the Kennington Common demonstration the Government was right to take precautions, but nothing had happened at the demonstration to warrant the introduction of such a bill, which would act as a gag. He had not advocated physical force, nor sought aid from any foreign country. He did, however, point out that those countries which had risen in revolt were now drawing up constitutions grounded on Chartist principles.¹⁶³ O'Connor's tone was much more subdued and one gets the feeling that he

¹⁶²Ibid., Friday, April 14, 1848, pp. 375-377.

¹⁶³Ibid., Tuesday, April 18, 1848, pp. 454-455.

was trying to prove that he could speak and behave with dignity and good sense.

Sir Robert Peel attacked O'Connor and other demagogues who "would involve the ignorant in the capital punishment of Treason, and content themselves with escaping from all risk and all responsibility" He also condemned monster meetings which he saw as a means of intimidating Parliament. He spoke directly to O'Connor as one who would ". . . bring together 100,000 persons and run a very great risk of creating disorders," and expressed his hope that the working classes would not be deluded into hoping that there must be antagonism between capital and labour.¹⁶⁴

After the Opposition Leader's attack came the Prime Minister's attack. He claimed that "punishment must follow the excitement and pastime of provoking others to treason."¹⁶⁵ He sounded quite unlike the Whig Home Secretary, who had showed such a libertarian turn of mind in 1839. However, circumstances were different, and with revolutionary ideas rampant in Europe, the Liberal Government was anxious to maintain law and order in the United Kingdom.

After the failure of the Kennington Common demonstration, and the ridicule of the Chartist Petition in Parliament, O'Connor retired to Snigs End to consider the state of the finances of his National Land Company. On May 12, 1848, he introduced his Bill to Amend the Friendly Societies Act to cover his company. This caused Sir Benjamin Hall, the hostile

¹⁶⁴ Ibid., pp. 463-469.

¹⁶⁵ Ibid., pp. 472-474.

Welsh Liberal Member for Marylebone, to investigate the scheme. He pointed out that nearly 100,000 names of subscribers had been registered, and yet the company was still only registered as a provisional one, although O'Connor had stated in July 1847 that the company would be completely registered within a week. No registration had been made, and no deeds lodged at the Registration Office. He demanded to know, therefore, when O'Connor intended to obtain a certificate of registration.¹⁶⁶

O'Connor replied by saying that he had found that the expense of complete registration would be enormous, and he was advised to bring in this Bill to amend the Friendly Societies Acts to cover the company.¹⁶⁷ The Bill was never given a second reading. On May 24, however, the Commons resolved to appoint a Select Committee to investigate the company, and on May 31, fifteen members, including O'Connor, were appointed under the chairmanship of the Judge Advocate. Gradually the complicated financial situation of the Land Plan was unravelled, and O'Connor was proved to be honest, if weak in administrative abilities. On July 30, the Committee reported that the company was illegal, its records inaccurate and registration was impossible. As a result, subscriptions dropped to £33. From January 1849 legal attempts began to force registration of the company. In July, O'Connor proposed to form a new society which could be registered as a

¹⁶⁶ Ibid., Friday, May 12, 1848, p. 928.

¹⁶⁷ Ibid., pp. 928-929.

friendly society, but to no avail. In March 1850 O'Connor promised the House to introduce a winding-up Bill. This was finally introduced in February 1851, and the Act to wind up the Land Company was finally passed in August 1851.

As Joy MacAskill notes, "the vision of a new society was less significant than the anxious discussion of the old" and "the Chartists shared with many Tories a powerful sense of the recent past."¹⁶⁸ Ms. MacAskill probably points to the fundamental paradox in Chartism. The Chartists were an active group which did not accept the status quo, but in their resistance they reinforced and even strengthened it. Their deviant behaviour was not a threat, for they were resisting change and advocating going back to an earlier way of life, not presenting a new ideology. However, to understand the society within which they operated, we have to take their ideas seriously and on their own terms. Most of the parliamentarians just shrugged the Chartists off as misguided failures, and we have to overcome the condescension and elitism of these men without going to the other extreme and romanticizing the Chartists as heroic revolutionaries.

There was little that was heroic to be found in O'Connor's behaviour. On May 23, 1848 O'Connor was again the focus of attacks in Parliament. Joseph Hume had been called upon by the Speaker to bring on his motion for extending the franchise, but as it was very late, he asked to postpone his motion till the first available day, i.e. June 20. O'Connor

¹⁶⁸ MacAskill, p. 304.

then attacked the Member for Montrose and one who had long supported the Chartists, for postponing the measure which he felt was so important to the working classes. This led Richard Cobden, the Member for the West Riding, to rise in Hume's defence.¹⁶⁹ Cobden made a slashing attack on O'Connor, in which he accused him of doing more ". . . to retard the political progress of the working classes of England than any other public man that ever lived." He reminded the House of O'Connor's opposition to the Anti-Corn Law League, and said that he viewed him as the ". . . leader of a small, insignificant and powerless party," and that he saw him not as the leader of the working classes, but as the leader of a small and organized faction. He told O'Connor that he would never fraternize with the Chartists, and warned Hume and the House not to be taken in by the Chartist leader's claims to have any power over the working classes. "He was weak before, he is harmless now, and whatever he may threaten or promise will be equally powerless and unimportant."¹⁷⁰ There had long been antagonism between Cobden and O'Connor. They had met in debate at Northampton on August 5, 1844, when O'Connor could find no effective reply to Cobden's thesis that repeal would benefit all classes.¹⁷¹ After the repeal of the Corn Laws the League was dissolved, so there was no further formal conflict between Chartists and Leaguers, but the conflict between middle and working classes remained. It can be seen

¹⁶⁹Hansard, Tuesday, May 23, 1848, pp. 1307-1309.

¹⁷⁰Ibid., pp. 1310-1311. ¹⁷¹Brown, p. 369.

at this time of Chartist revival. Cobden feared any extension of the franchise, and this outburst against O'Connor is a way of opposing the Chartist demand for political power for the ordinary people, and a typical middle class response.

Lord John Russell chastised both Cobden and O'Connor for their attacks, and stated his belief that the people did not want the implementation of the People's Charter, nor any other plan of great reform. They wanted to see gradual reform and the country in a peaceful and orderly state.¹⁷² He expected the working classes to think what he hoped and expected them to think. As E.P. Thompson says: "If we stop history at a given point, then there are no classes, but simply a multitude of individuals with a multitude of experiences."¹⁷³ If we watch them over a period of social change "... we observe patterns in their relationships, their ideas, and their institutions." Lord John Russell expected the people to accept the Whig concept of society.

After the fiasco of the Chartist petition, Chartism was down but not out. Militant Chartists allied with Irish Confederates to plot simultaneous risings. The authorities took action first against the Irish extremists, and then against the militant Chartists after disturbances in the metropolitan area and in the North. Lord Brougham brought up the matter of these disturbances in the Lords on June 2.

¹⁷² Hansard, pp. 1311-1312.

¹⁷³ E.P. Thompson, The Making of the English Working Class, Middlesex: Penguin Books Ltd., 1963, p. 11.

He stated that the population had been constantly exposed to lawless processions, and that although no serious injury had been inflicted upon the community, trade had been seriously interrupted. The Duke of Wellington acknowledged that the London area had been under arms for the past four nights, and that since this had become a recurring evil, he hoped that the Lords would consider a means of preventing its repetition. He suggested two ways of dealing with such meetings, either by preventing the assembly of monster meetings which were too large for control or for discussion, or by making those who called the meetings together responsible for whatever damage was done.¹⁷⁴

The Marquess of Lansdowne agreed that processions tending to disturb the peace should be dispersed, and pointed out that the processions of the last few days had been stopped and the peace maintained. The Duke of Richmond too felt that those who organized such meetings should be held responsible for the consequences. He pointed out that there had been disturbances in provincial towns as well as in the London area, and felt that an example should be made of the ringleaders by bringing them to trial. Lord Chief Justice Denman commented that recently Mr. Justice Patteson had warned those who took part in such insurrections not to underrate the consequences of resisting attempts to disperse

¹⁷⁴ Hansard, Third Series, vol. 99, Friday, June 2, 1848, pp. 235-238.

them. He hoped that all agitation would stop, or any hope of achieving constitutional reform would be endangered.¹⁷⁵

Again on June 5 Lord Brougham brought to the attention of the Lords the fact that there were nightly disturbances, and that the population was greatly alarmed, and also exasperated by the lawless behaviour of these mobs. Lord Lansdowne replied for the Government that measures had been taken to end these disturbances, and he hoped that they would be successful.¹⁷⁶

In the Commons, George Thompson, the Chartist Radical M.P. for Tower Hamlets, raised the subject of conflict between the police and a group of people "assembled to discuss political matters." He asked the Home Secretary on what authority the police had dispersed them, and had indeed attacked those who were assembled in Bishop Bonner's Fields, although the peace had not been disturbed. Grey, in response, took full responsibility, and stated that the police were acting under his instructions not to allow meetings held at "unseasonable hours," but this particular meeting had not been interrupted by the police. After the meeting a church was attacked, and it was then that the police attempted to disperse the crowd, and a conflict occurred.¹⁷⁷

¹⁷⁵Ibid., pp. 238-240.

¹⁷⁶Ibid., Monday, June 5, 1848, pp. 331-332.

¹⁷⁷Ibid., pp. 337-338.

George Thompson brought the matter up again three days later, when he asked for information about the "outrages" which had been committed by the police on June 4 against "peaceable, loyal and unoffending individuals" in his constituency. He asked for a Governmental inquiry into this case. He was keeping the pressure on the Government and probably trying to bring the police into disrepute. Grey replied that he had made inquiries into complaints of unprovoked assaults by the police, because he had received complaints about their "brutal and barbarous" behaviour from residents. He had received a great deal of evidence which suggested that the police had acted properly, and he read a letter from an Inspector Robert Horn linking, by implication, a meeting of Irish Confederates, held at 3:00 P.M. with a Chartist meeting held at 5:00 P.M. According to the Inspector the Chartist meeting, attended by approximately 3,000 people, was quiet until 6:35 P.M., when it broke up, and between four and five hundred people began to hurl stones at a church. He concluded by reading from a constituent's letter praising the behaviour of the police, and by stating that he had received eighty-one letters complaining about the inconvenience caused by such meetings.¹⁷⁸

On June 20, the Chartist Radical, Joseph Hume, made a motion that national representation should be extended to include all householders, that there should be a secret ballot, that the duration of Parliament should not exceed

¹⁷⁸ Ibid., Thursday, June 8, 1848, pp. 502-510.

three years, and that "the apportionment of Members to Population shall be made more equal,"¹⁷⁹ in effect a mini Charter. Henry Drummond, the Liberal Conservative Member for West Surrey, chided Hume for raising false hopes, and for basing the necessity for his measure on the Kennington Common disturbances, and for believing that his plan would preserve the peace better than that devised by the Government. He asked the House not to use "Chartist" as a term of reproach.¹⁸⁰ At one time the term "Reformer" was reproachful, then came the name "Radical," and now it was "Chartist."

The Prime Minister, however, reiterated his belief in gradual reform, but was not prepared to accept the Chartist principle that "every person of full age, and unconvicted of any crime, ought to have a vote."¹⁸¹ When this debate was resumed on July 6, Joseph Hume hoped that, in the light of the numerous petitions on the subject, the House would believe that the country was interested in this subject, as he certainly was as he introduced similar measures regularly two or three times a year. He also pointed out that, although he had been asked to bring forward such a motion before April 10 (i.e. before the Chartist demonstration and petition presentation), he had not done so. He believed that all classes supported public order, and that the House should consider whether "the Radical Reformers, who were

¹⁷⁹Ibid., Tuesday, June 20, 1848, p. 879.

¹⁸⁰Ibid., pp. 906-909. ¹⁸¹Ibid., pp. 915-917.

improperly called Chartists, had any just grounds for complaint.¹⁸² He claimed that even the special constables in Manchester, who had broken up a Chartist meeting on April 10, had stated that they were not content with the present state of the House of Commons.¹⁸³

Mr. Sergeant Talfourd, the Liberal M.P. for Reading, pointed out that the middle classes did not want the Charter. He did not contend, however, that property should always be the only qualification for the franchise, but he reminded the House that the subject of their legislation was often related to property. He agreed that the working classes possessed many good qualities, but at this time many were ill-educated, and many were involved in outbreaks which turned them into robbers and criminals. If he could "perceive any corresponding increase of the intelligence with the increase of power in the people since 1832" he would support not just this measure, but universal suffrage.¹⁸⁴

Richard Cobden said he had nothing against the Chartists, but he was opposed to universal suffrage. He drew the attention of his fellow M.P.'s to the double standard supported by the Chartists. If, as they held, a man should have the right to vote because he paid taxes, so should a woman.¹⁸⁵ O'Connor, naturally, spoke in favour of widening the franchise, and did not address the issue raised by Cobden.

¹⁸² Ibid., pp. 879-881. ¹⁸³ Ibid., p. 885.

¹⁸⁴ Ibid., vol. 100, Thursday, July 6, 1848, pp. 176-177.

¹⁸⁵ Ibid., pp. 183-188.

The Chartists were not prepared for such a radical change in a male-dominated society. When the House divided, Hume's motion was defeated by 267 votes.¹⁸⁶ This was another setback for Hume, and for Chartist hopes.

In August 1848, while introducing a motion in favour of the secret ballot, Henry Berkley, Liberal M.P. for Bristol for eleven years, made a slashing attack upon the Chartists:

I am aware that the persons calling themselves Chartists, consider the ballot one of the points of their Charter. I consider the ballot disgraced by their advocacy, because I have ever found them the propagandists of violence, the enemies of reason, and the opponents of all reform but that included in their own peculiar project.

He did admit that there some conscientious people amongst them, but his admission seemed grudging.¹⁸⁷

The final reference in Parliament in 1848 to the Chartists came in August, when the Chartist Radical Member for Finsbury, Thomas Wakley, presented a petition agreed to at a public meeting, complaining of the treatment of the recently convicted Chartists who were imprisoned in Maidstone Gaol. The petitioners claimed that the Home Secretary had issued special orders for the coercive treatment. Wakley himself believed this allegation to be unfounded, but wished to have his beliefs confirmed.¹⁸⁸

¹⁸⁶Ibid., pp. 208-229.

¹⁸⁷Ibid., Tuesday, August 8, 1848, pp. 1240-1241.

¹⁸⁸Ibid., vol. 101, Friday, August 25, 1848, pp. 525-526.

The Home Secretary denied these charges, and was supported by George Dodd, the Protectionist Member for Maidstone and a visiting magistrate at the prison. Dodd said that there had been considerable misrepresentation of the treatment of the five Chartist prisoners. As a visiting magistrate he had seen those prisoners on a weekly basis, and according to Dodd they were very grateful for the lenient treatment they were receiving. He went into details about their haircuts and their food, and stressed that they were allowed access to books, subject to the chaplain's approval.¹⁸⁹

The arrests of national, local and allied Irish leaders weakened the Chartist movement again, and it began a period of disintegration and splintering over largely regional or personal issues. The eccentric O'Connor began to degenerate mentally, and his odd behaviour became an embarrassment to Chartism. In 1849 he had addressed the Queen as his "Well-Beloved Cousin" and signed himself "Feargus, Rex, by the Grace of the People."¹⁹⁰ In February 1852 he was gaoled for seven days for hitting a policeman. In April he went to the U.S.A., but returned and was soon in trouble again. This time it was for attacking a fellow M.P. He apologized for that act, but on the following day, June 9, he attacked another Member, and the House passed a motion that O'Connor should be taken into custody by the Sergeant-at-Arms.¹⁹¹

¹⁸⁹ Ibid., pp. 526-528. ¹⁹⁰ Ward, p. 230.

¹⁹¹ Hansard, vol. 122, Wednesday, June 9, 1852, p. 373.

On June 10 Mr. Bell informed the House that he had obtained certificates from two doctors stating that in their opinion, O'Connor required medical treatment. Bell felt that O'Connor had been arrested for an offense committed when he was of unsound mind.¹⁹² His release was secured by his sister, Harriet on June 16, and he was committed to the Chiswick asylum of Dr. Harrington Tuke.¹⁹³

Those Chartists who remained fought among themselves, and since they no longer posed any great threat to law and order, references to them in Parliament became fewer and fewer. Occasionally petitions for the release of Chartist prisoners were presented but, for all intents and purposes, the parliamentarians no longer felt them to be an important issue.

After O'Connor's fall, Chartism became even more fragmented, and its members reacted differently to the progress of mid-Victorian England. However, as David Jones states with a real insight into the importance of this movement:

In their support for Chartist schools, halls, churches, newspapers and estates; in their campaigns against capital punishment, army flogging and impressment; and in their belief that science and machinery should ultimately be harnessed for the benefit of all, we catch a glimpse of an alternative society - egalitarian, humane and harmonious.¹⁹⁴

It is the fact that the Chartists saw society in an optimistic way, and were able to see an alternative way for society to develop that makes them worthy of our attention in the twentieth century.

¹⁹² Ibid., Thursday, June 10, 1852, p. 417.

¹⁹³ Ward, p. 231. ¹⁹⁴ Jones, p. 188.

CONCLUSION

In the short term the Chartist Movement failed, but as time went by the radical political aims of the Charter, with the exception of annual parliaments, were achieved. Thus the Chartists helped to shape not only the mid-nineteenth century of which they were a part, but also twentieth century British society.

In the period 1839-1849 the Chartists tried to pressure the members of the British Parliament to adopt the six points of the Charter. They saw the attainment of political power as the means of obtaining social influence, and attempted to "exert the collective power of the class to humanize the environment."¹ The Chartist members of the British working class, however, were on the whole misunderstood by the upper and middle classes of the country in general and in Parliament in particular. The parliamentarians on the whole saw themselves as the upholders of the traditional British political and social institutions against a group of radicals which was threatening them. The parliamentarians believed themselves to be the protectors of the moral code which represented the interests of all classes. The working class, however, was

¹E.P. Thompson, The Making of the English Working Class, London: Victor Gollancz, 1963, p. 913.

trying to put itself into a new relationship to the upper and middle classes, and was attempting to move out of the old mode of deference into a new mode of independence.

The contradictory perceptions of the different classes can be seen in the parliamentarians' responses to the Chartists in Parliament in the decade 1839-1849, and it is hardly surprising that the Chartists were supported by such a small group of M.P.'s. When Chartism "failed" there was no doubt a collective sigh of relief in Parliament, but a new phase of class relationships was about to begin and change was inevitable.

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Appendix A

AIMS AND RULES OF THE NATIONAL CHARTER ASSOCIATION*

A Plan for Organising the Chartists of Great Britain

Agreed upon at a meeting of delegates appointed by the people, and held at the Griffin Inn, Great Ancoast-Street, Manchester, on Monday, July 20, 1840.

Designation of the Association

1. That the Chartists of Great Britain be incorporated into one Society to be called 'The National Charter Association of Great Britain'.

Objects

2. The object of this Association is to obtain a 'Radical Reform' of the House of Commons, in other words, a full and faithful Representation of the entire people of the United Kingdom.

Principles

3. The principles requisite to secure such a Representation of the people are:- The right of voting for Members of Parliament by every male of twenty-one years of age and of sound mind; Annual Elections; Vote by Ballot; no property qualifications for Members of Parliament; Payment of members; and a division of the kingdom into Electoral Districts; giving to each district a proportionate number of Representatives according to the number of electors.

*Northern Star, 1 August 1840.

Means

4. To accomplish the foregoing object none but peaceable and constitutional means shall be employed, such as public meetings to discuss grievances arising from the present system; to show the utility of the proposed change, and to petition Parliament to adopt the same.

Conditions of Membership

5. All persons will become members of the Association on condition of signing a declaration, signifying their agreement with its objects, principles and constitution, when they will be presented with cards of membership which shall be renewed quarterly, and for which they shall each pay the sum of twopence.

Registration of Members

6. A book shall be kept by the Executive Council (hereinafter described) in which shall be entered the names, employment and residence of the members of this Association throughout the kingdom.

Classes

7. Wherever possible, the members shall be formed into classes of ten persons; which classes shall meet weekly or at any other stated periods, as most convenient; and one out of, and by, each class shall be nominated as leader (and appointed by the Executive as hereinafter ordered) who shall collect from each member the sum of one penny per week, to the funds of the Association.

Ward Divisions

8. Each town, wherever practicable, shall be divided into wards and divisions according to the plan of the Municipal Reform Act. Once in every month a meeting of the members of the said ward shall be held, when addresses shall be delivered, and Society's business transacted. The leaders within the said wards shall attend the said monthly meetings, and give such a report of the state of their classes as they may deem best, provided always that such report be given in temperate and lawful language.

Election of Ward Collector

9. At the first meeting of each ward or division, a collector shall be nominated (afterwards to be appointed by the Executive as hereinafter ordered) to whom shall be paid the monies collected from the classes by the leaders; and the said collector shall pay the said money to the Treasurer (assistant) of the town or borough, at the weekly meeting of the council.

Local Officers

10. Each principal town, with its suburban villages, shall have a council of nine persons, including an assistant treasurer and secretary.

Duties of Local Treasurer

11. The aforesaid local treasurer shall receive the money from the ward collectors, and all the monies subscribed for the Association in the said township and suburbs; he shall keep an exact account and transmit the proportion (one moiety) due once a month to the General Treasurer.

Duties of Local Secretary

12. The aforesaid secretary shall keep a minute book of all the transactions of the Town Council; and a record of all meetings connected with the Society in his jurisdiction, and shall, with the sanction and under the direction of the said Council, transmit for publication such portions of the said minutes or records as may be deemed necessary.

Duties of Local Council

13. The Town Council shall meet for the transaction of business once every week, and shall have the power of appropriating to the purposes of the society in their own locality a sum not exceeding one half of the subscriptions and other monies received in the said locality. They shall also see that the recommendations and instructions of the Executive Council are carried into effect, and they shall have full power to adopt such means as may seem to them meet, provided such means are in conformity with the fundamental rules of the Association and do not contravene the decisions of the Executive Council.

County and Riding Government

14. In each County or Riding there shall be a council, the number to be according to the circumstances and population of the said County or Riding, with a sub-treasurer or secretary.

General Government

15. The general government of this Association shall be entrusted to a General Executive Council, composed of seven persons including a Treasurer and Secretary.

Duties of General Treasurer

16. The General Treasurer of this Association shall be responsible for all monies entrusted to him, in such penal sum as may be determined upon by the Executive Council; he shall keep an exact account of all monies received and expended by the Association, and shall once every month, publish a statement of the same in the 'Northern Star', 'Scottish Patriot', and in such other of the Chartist newspapers as may be selected by the Executive Council, and once every three months a full balance sheet, which shall be first examined by auditors appointed for the purpose by the Executive Council.

Nomination and Election of the Executive Council

17. The nomination of candidates for the Executive Committee shall take place in the Counties and Ridings, each County or Riding being allowed to nominate one candidate on the first day of December each year - the names of the persons so nominated shall be returned immediately by the secretary, called sub-secretary of the County or Riding to the General Secretary - (this year to the Secretary of the Provisional Committee who have full powers to carry this plan into effect in the best possible manner) - and a list of the whole to be transmitted by him, per post, to all the local (assistant) Secretaries, who shall take the elections of their localities on the first day of January following, and immediately forward the result of such election to the General Secretary, who shall lay the same before the Executive for examination, and by their order publish within one week of receiving the whole of such returns in the 'Northern Star', 'Scottish Patriot', and in any other Democratic Journal, a list of the majorities, and declare who are the persons duly elected. The Executive Council shall be elected for twelve months, when a new Council shall be chosen in the manner and at the period aforesaid, outgoing members being eligible for re-election.

Power and Duties of the Executive

19. The Executive Council shall be empowered to adopt any measure for the advancement of the objects of this Association as may be consistent with its fundamental laws, for which purpose they shall have the disposal of one half, at least, of the monies collected throughout the Society and lodged with the general Treasurer. They shall appoint all the members of the County or Riding and Local Councils, and all officers throughout the Association, in the appointment of whom, however, they shall be confined to those who may be nominated by the members resident in each place.

Time of Nomination and Appointment of Subordinate Council and Officers

20. To prevent any interruption of the election of the Executive Council, the nomination of County or Riding Councils shall annually take place on the 1st day of February of each year, and the appointment on the 1st day of March following.

Remuneration of Officers

21. The General Secretary shall be paid for his services the sum of 2 per week, and each member of the Executive Council the sum of £1.10s per week during the period of their sittings.

Compensation

22. The members of the Executive shall be entitled to compensation for the loss consequent upon their acceptance of office, either be being employed as missionaries during any recess that may happen while they continue in their official capacity, or in such other way as may be most convenient for the Association; the question of compensation to be determined by the County or Riding councils. When members of the Executive shall be employed as missionaries, their salaries shall be the same as when employed in the Council. Coach-hire, and one half of any other incidental expenses shall be paid to them in addition, by the parties who may request their services, or in the event of being employed by the Executive to open new districts, the same proportion of expenses shall be allowed out of the general fund.

Appendix B

GRIEVANCES CONTAINED IN THE 1842
NATIONAL PETITION

1. The working classes had no parliamentary representation although they paid taxes.
2. There were gross inequalities in representation.
3. There was much bribery and corruption in elections.
4. Many people were living in poverty and distress yet the House still operated a cruel Poor-Law.
5. There was an enormous difference between the wages of the poor and the salaries of the rich, i.e. between the producing and non-producing members of Society.
6. The people's right to meet freely in public places had been infringed, and 500 had been gaoled after being tried by "packed" juries.
7. An unconstitutional police force was distributed country-wide to prevent the people from exercising their rights.
8. A great army was maintained at public expense.
9. Factory hours were too long.
10. Agricultural workers were paid starvation wages.
11. Monopolies existed.
12. Taxes were imposed on basic necessities.
13. Compulsory support of the established Church was imposed, although most of the working class were dissenters.

Hansard, Third Series, vol. 62, Monday, May 2, 1842,
pp. 1376-1381.

Appendix C

OCCUPATIONS OF PROMINENT CHARTISTS IN 1841

Weaver	130	Gardener	4
Shoe-maker	97	Mechanic	4
Tailor	58	Moulder	4
Framework knitter	33	Nailer	4
Cordwainer	30	Needle-finisher	4
Labourer	19	Warper	4
Carpenter	18	Watchmaker	4
Joiner	17	Baker	3
Wool-comber	17	Boot-closer	3
Boot- and shoe-maker	13	Bricklayer	3
Mason	12	Brush-maker	3
Hatter	12	Chair-maker	3
Potter	11	Currier	3
Printer	10	Engineer	3
Painter	10	Hairdresser	3
Spinner	10	Lace-maker	3
Newsagent	9	Machine-maker	3
Stonemason	9	Plumber	3
Pitman	8	Publican	3
Smith	8	Shipwright	3
Silk-worker	7	Tinman	3
Block-printer	7	Watch-and clock-maker	3
Boot-maker	7	Blacksmith	2
Flax-dresser	6	Brass-founder	2
Cabinet-maker	6	Carver	2
Calico-printer	6	China-painter	2
Cloth-dresser	6	China-potter	2
Dyer	6	Clothier	2
Basket-maker	5	Confectioner	2
Bookseller	5	Dairyman	2
Grocer	5	Farmer	2
Glover	5	Fitter	2
Linen-weaver	5	Framesmith	2
Plasterer	5	Greengrocer	2
Schoolmaster	5	Millwright	2
Twister	5	Needle-stamper	2
Turner	5	Pattern-maker	2
Button-maker	4	Packer	2
Carder	4	Pan-maker	2
Cooper	4	Paper-stainer	2
Fustian-cutter	4	Pipe-maker	2

Sheet-iron-roller	2	Horse-shoer	1
Shopman	2	House agent	1
Stationer	2	Leather-cutter	1
Tool-maker	2	Leather-dealer	1
Upholsterer	2	Letter-press printer	1
Workhouseman	2	Locksmith	1
Whitesmith	2	Medicine-dealer	1
Beer-seller	1	Model-maker	1
Besom-maker	1	News vendor	1
Banding-manufacturer	1	Needle-hardener	1
Bleacher	1	Needle-maker	1
Bookbinder	1	Needle-pointer	1
Bodkin-maker	1	Overlooker	1
Brewer	1	Paper-maker	1
Book-keeper	1	Porter	1
Brazier	1	Rag Merchant	1
Brightsmith	1	Salesman	1
Brass-finisher	1	Screw-turner	1
Brick-maker	1	Shopkeeper	1
Butcher	1	Sign-writer	1
Block-cutter	1	Snaffle-maker	1
Plater	1	Striker	1
Quarryman	1	Stuff-dresser	1
Reed-maker	1	Tea-dealer	1
Carter	1	Tilt-maker	1
Chartist missionary	1	Tinplate-worker	1
Clerk	1	Trunk-maker	1
Coach-trimmer	1	Twist-hand	1
Coal-dealer	1	Weaver and newsagent	1
Collier	1	Watch-glass-cutter	1
Dirt-refiner	1	Wire-drawer	1
Draper	1	Saddler	1
Dresser	1	Sawyer	1
Enamel-fireman	1	Shipsmith	1
Engraver	1	Silk-glover	1
Fancy-silk hosier	1	Spur-maker	1
Fancy-weaver	1	Stay-maker	1
Fish-hook-maker	1	Stripper	1
Fishing-tackle-maker	1	Stuff-presser	1
Forger	1	Teazle-setter	1
Foundryman	1	Tinner	1
Forgeman	1	Tobacconist	1
Harness-maker	1	Twine-spinner	1
Hawker	1	Veterinary surgeon	1
Hinge-maker	1	Wheelwright	1
		Wool-sorter	1
		Total	853

Source: Nominations to the General Council in the
Northern Star, 1841.

Appendix D

RULES AND REGULATIONS OF THE CHARTIST LAND CO-OPERATIVE COMPANY

To consist of an unlimited number of shareholders. Shares,
£ 2 10s. each.
To be paid in weekly settlements of 3d., 6d., 1s., and
upwards.

Objects of the Society

To purchase land on which to locate such of its members as
may be selected for that purpose, in order to demonstrate to
the working classes of the kingdom - firstly, the value of
land, as a means of making them independent of the grinding
capitalists; and, secondly to shew them the necessity of
securing the speedy enactment of the 'People Charter', which
should do for them nationally, what this society proposes to
do sectionally: the accomplishment of the political and
social emancipation of the enslaved and degraded working
classes being the peculiar object of the Society.

Source: Northern Star, 3 May 1845.

Appendix E

LIST OF ALL THOSE M.P.'S WHO SUPPORTED
CRAWFORD'S AMENDMENT ON

FEBRUARY 1, 1844

E.G. Barnard (Liberal - Greenwich)
Capt. Bernal (Liberal - Rochester)
R.J. Blewitt (Liberal - Monmouth)
J.J. Bodkin (Liberal - Galway)
Dr. J. Bowring (Chartist Radical - Bolton)
J. Bright (Liberal - Manchester)
J. Brotherton (Liberal - Salford)
R. Cobden (Liberal - Stockport)
J. Collett (Liberal - Athlone)
R. Currie (Liberal - Northampton)
T. Duncombe (Chartist Radical - Finsbury)
H. Elphinstone (Liberal - Lewes)
J. Fielder (Chartist Radical - Oldham)
T.M. Gibson (Liberal - Manchester)
T. Gisborne (Liberal - Nottingham)
C. Hindley (Liberal - Ashton Under Lyne)
J. Hume (Chartist Radical - Montrose)
Gen. W.A. Johnson (Liberal - Oldham)
Capt. J.H. Plumridge (Liberal - Penryn and Falmouth)
J.L. Ricardo (Liberal - Stoke-on-Trent)
J.A. Roebuck (Liberal - Bath)
T. Thornely (Liberal - Wolverhampton)
J.S. Trelawny (Liberal - Tavistock)
Hon. C. Villiers (Liberal - Wolverhampton)
T. Wakley (Chartist Radical - Finsbury)
H. Warburton (Liberal - Kendal)
H.G. Ward (Chartist Radical - Sheffield)
W. Williams (Liberal - Coventry)
H.R. Yorke (Liberal - York)

Tellers: S. Crawford (Liberal - Rochdale)
R. Wallace (Liberal - Greenock)

Ayes 29; Noes 285:- Majority 256