Taking Chartism Seriously

Chartism was a well-organised and well-supported working-class movement. Why did it fail to achieve its objectives?

It is time that we started to take the Chartist movement seriously. The main obstacle to doing so, however, is that this movement for political reform, which spanned the years 1838-48, was a failure.

The People's Charter contained six political objectives: universal manhood suffrage, annual parliaments, vote by ballot, wages for MPs, the abolition of the property qualification for MPs and the creation of equal electoral districts. These were incorporated into the National Petition for Reform, submitted to Parliament on three separate occasions, in 1839, 1842 and 1848. None of the 'six points' was achieved during the lifetime of the movement and most Chartists accepted that their efforts had been in vain.

Yet the history of British industrial and social reform in the nineteenth century has invariably been written in terms of success. British industrial enterprise led the world in this period, and the early problems of an industrial society were addressed by successful reform movements. Even the points of the Charter (with the exception of annual parliaments) had been conceded by the early twentieth century, through the Reform Acts of 1887, 1884 and 1918. In light of this gradual (and peaceful) transition to majority democracy, the Chartists' demands appear premature. Put at its simplest, they are seen to have wanted too much, too soon. Perhaps they should have waited for the unfolding of the historical process which would have delivered citizenship to them at the appropriate moment.

Leadership

This historical analysis carries with it the assumption, which the wealthier classes often made at the time of the Chartist movement, that working people were not yet 'ready' for the vote. This view of the Chartists can be supported by circumstantial evidence and reinforced by hindsight. For example, there was no national system of education before 1870, so it might be argued that the electorate of 1918 would have been better educated than that of 1838 and therefore better able to exercise the vote. Or, in retrospect, surely it was better to give 'respectable' working men the experience of running new model trade unions in the 1830s and the 1840s before they tackled the infinitely more complex task of running the country. Such arguments appear to be validated by the failure of Chartism, which in itself could be taken as a signal of its own internal weakness.

The Victorians themselves argued, following Darwin's *Origin of Species* (published in 1859, shortly after Chartism's demise), that it was the strongest specimen of any species that would thrive whilst the weakest failed. Accordingly, Fergus O'Connor, Chartist leader and editor of the Northern Star.

In fact, Gannage's *History of the Chartist Movement*, which was first published in 1854, and then re-published in 1894 when the issue of working-class organisation was once again coming to the fore, provided a compellingly simple explanation of Chartist failure. This view was picked up and developed by subsequent historians. A working class, not yet ready for the vote, expressed its political immaturity by following what J.T. Ward referred to as the 'charlatans, cowards and crooks' who led the movement. Surely, the argument might go, a class ready for citizenship would have recognised O'Connor for what he was, a braggart and a coward — the man Punch at the time dubbed 'Feargose'. So, the pejorative analysis of O'Connor always carried with it an implicit comment on the 'readiness' of the working class for the franchise.

This has subsequently been developed as the classic dichotomy between the supposedly 'physical force' followers of O'Connor and the 'general force' followers of William Lovett. In this model of analysis, the fact that most Chartists chose to follow O'Connor alienated potential middle-class support.
The rank and file

behind this orthodox interpretation of the movement lies an emphasis on the irrational nature of the Chartist rank and file. Mark Howell’s early history, written in 1848, stressed the importance of economic distress in generating support for the movement. He maintained that inexperience engendered by breakfastless tables and fireless grates was the driving force of much northern Chartism.

Again, this reproduces a common view expressed by the middle classes at the time when the Chartist movement was growing.

Elizabeth Gaskell wrote a novel in 1848 called *Mary Barton* in which the father of Mary, the main character, John Barton, was a Chartist. Although sympatheising with the plight of working people, Gaskell omitted to mention anywhere in the novel that Chartism had a political programme. Instead, she portrayed it simply in terms of economic distress. Contemporary observers with less sympathy for the position of working people were apt to see the movement as the object of ridicule, once they were convinced that it posed no threat to their property.

This is shown by the famous *Punch* cartoon *A Physical Force Chartist Arming for the Fight* to commentary on the failure of the third Chartist petition for reform, submitted in April 1848, and by the cartoon indicating ‘How to deal with female Chartists’. A working-class woman supposed Chartism in large numbers, despite its movement’s commitment only to manhood suffrage. In the eyes of middle-class observers, women who were active in political movements were seen as particularly threatening. The presence of women in Chartism hallucinated accepted views of a woman’s role and, as the cartoon shows, this singled them out for attack and ridicule.

An alternative view

What these views from the time, and the historical interpretations which reproduced them, have in common is that they do not represent Chartism as a serious and substantial political movement. Yet the view that Chartism was a formidable political force, well organised and capable of figures in the approach of historians like George Thomson and James Epstein, Epstein’s biography of O’Connor, for example, suggests that this much maligned figure was revered by so many working people because he shared their view of the need to construct and maintain an independent working-class movement.

In a similar way, Thompson argues that we should see Chartism, as the response of a literate and sophisticated working class. Clearly, a revisionist approach to the leadership of O’Connor carries with it the notion that Chartism was a real political force in its own terms and that it possessed a politically conscious membership.

Explanations of Chartist failure might thus focus less on the internal weaknesses of the movement and more on the hostile context in which it developed. From this point of view, Chartism failed because the governments of the day held firm and refused to make concessions in the direction of the six points, the army remained local, and the middle-class refused to ally in any numbers with the Chartists. Even if the 1832 Reform Act had not delivered all that they had wanted, middle-class men in the towns knew they had more to gain from a system based on a limited franchise, which included them, than on a wider franchise that gave voting power to their workers.

The Chartists inherited much of their ideology from an eighteenth-century radical tradition. Within this the state was seen as ‘Old Corruption’, a body elected by corrupt means to represent a small number of parasites rather than the People. But, when the state began to introduce tangible reforms, such as the repeal of the Corn Laws (1846) and the Ten Hours Act (1847), it became increasingly difficult for the Chartists to portray convincingly the existing system as incorrigibly corrupt. The movement failed because it was confronted by a self-confident system, reinforced by the settlement of 1832, which feared the effects of granting the Charter more than the consequences of rejecting it.

The Chartist placard

The closer we get to the Chartists, the more they appear to deserve to be taken seriously, and on their own terms, in the way that these historians suggest. The Chartist placard issued before the meeting on 10 April 1848 (called to submit the third petition), gives a very different insight into the Chartist frame of mind and represents the movement in a very different way from that provided by

*A physical force Chartist arming for the fight*, *Punch*, 1848.

the strained humour of Mr. Punch’s cartoons. From it we can identify many of the important elements of the Chartist approach to politics.

The peaceful nature of the demonstration is stressed. Chartism was, after all, built around a constitutional strategy — to petition Parliament for redress of grievance. This was one of the few legally permissible avenues for the representation of grievances available to working people at the time. The distinction between O’Connor and the ‘moral force’ Chartists was not the choice between physical force or persuasion. Rather it was the choice between the mass petition and demonstration, in the manner of Henry Hunt and Thomas Attwood in earlier movements, and strategies such as ‘teetotal Chartism’ or ‘knowledge Chartism’, which sought to demonstrate that the working class was ‘respectable’ enough to be trusted with the vote. Most Chartists argued that the vote was a human right that had been taken away from them at some time in the past. What they sought was a restitution of this fundamental right.

O’Connor opposed the ‘moral force’ initiatives, which appeared in 1840, on the grounds that one should not have to qualify for the human right to vote any more than one should have to qualify for, say, equal treatment before the law, or freedom from arbitrary arrest. The right to vote should not depend on people achieving a particular level of education or, for that matter, of sobriety.

‘How to treat the female Chartists’, *Punch*, 1848.
Hunger politics

The same placard also raised the issue of 'hunger politics' by stating: 'We and our families are pinning in misery, want and starvation! But the issue here was not simply that Chartist were angry because they were hungry. Rather, they were projecting a complex political argument in which the economic position that working people found themselves in could be seen as an indictment of a corrupt political system which had failed to represent their needs. In a similar way, the female Chartists of Manchester asked in a letter to the Northern Star in 1842:

Why is it that in the midst of plenty, we are in such a condition? Why is it that those who have produced everything in our society, without whom the factories would not have been built, the machinery made, the railroads constructed...who build and man the ships, make the hats, shoes and coats, and till the land - cannot get enough to quell the ravings of hunger?

These questions were not simply about the availability of an adequate food supply. The Chartists were posing political questions about the justice of the way rewards were distributed in society, and doing this in a way that related directly to their own experience.

Similarly, the placard for the 10 April meeting ties the idea of 'a fair day's wages for a fair day's work' to the notion of political freedom. 'We are political serfs—we demand to be free.' It is easy to see why contemporary observers like Elizabeth Gaskell would have preferred Chartism to be about simply providing food for the hungry. But to the Chartists themselves political and economic issues were not divisible in this way.

The last part of the placard gives some insight into the degree of organisation necessary for a Chartist mass-rally. In 1838, when signatures were being collected for the first petition, a series of similar meetings was held in various parts of the country. A participant at one of these meetings, held just outside Manchester, wrote of 300,000 people gathering together, accompanied by 'hundreds of bands of music.' Such meetings, which were invariably peaceful, were not spontaneous affairs; they were the result of careful planning within a closely organised movement. It is perhaps the scale of the movement that is most impressive, looking back from a present-day perspective.

The fact that meetings like this — the size of four Wembley cup-final crowds — could be drawn together for the purposes of political debate remains an extraordinary achievement which has not been matched by any British popular movement since the demise of Chartism. In addition, O'Connor enjoyed a national circulation for the Northern Star which frequently exceeded that of the Times. After 1840, and the formation of the National Charter Association (NCA), it was possible to join the Chartists in a formal sense, paying a subscription and attending regular branch meetings, rather like a modern political party. By the summer of 1842 the NCA consisted of 400 branches and 50,000 members.

CHARTIST DEMONSTRATION!!

"PEACE AND ORDER" is our MOTO!

TO THE WORKING MEN OF LONDON,

Fellow Men,—The Press having misrepresented and vilified us and our intentions, the Demonstration Committee therefore consider it to be their duty to state that the grievances of us (the Working Classes) are deep and our demands just. We and our families are pinning in misery, want, and starvation! We demand a fair day's wages for a fair day's work! We are the slaves of capital—we demand protection to our labour. We are political serfs—we demand to be free. We therefore invite all well disposed to join in our peaceful procession on MONDAY NEXT, April 10, as it is for the good of all that we seek to remove the evils under which we groan.

The following are the places of Meeting of the Chartists, the Trades, the Irish Confederates & Repeal Bodies: East Division on Stepney Green at 8 o'clock; City and Finsbury Division on Clerkenwell Green at 9 o'clock; West Division in Russell Square at 9 o'clock; and the South Division in Peckham Fields at 9 o'clock, and proceed from thence to Kennington Common.

Signed on behalf of the Committee, John Arnett, Sec.

The Chartist placard of 1848.

A sense of community

Historians working on the impact of Chartism in a number of locations have identified the existence of what might be called a Chartist culture: a network of schools, discussion groups, libraries, churches and other meeting places where politics could be debated and views exchanged. It is clear that, in the 1840s, being a Chartist meant much more than simply signing a petition. This element of community within the movement is possibly the key to its strength.

Chartism drew its membership from what were called at the time the 'industrial districts'—often small communities, which characterised Britain in the early stages of industrialisation. These might be centres of factory production, mining, the domestic system or the workshop industries. Chartist support came from the home-based handloom weavers and the factory-based textile workers of Lancashire and Lanarkshire (cotton), and the West Riding of Yorkshire (wool). It drew in the frame-knitters of the East Midlands (Nottingham, Derby and Leicester), and the metal workers of Birmingham and the Black Country. It was strong among the colliers and iron-workers in areas such as South Wales and the North East of England and the pottery workers of Staffordshire, and also in traditional trades such as tailoring, building and shoemaking.

What was important in generating and sustaining Chartist membership in these localities was the shared common experience of early industrialisation; the fact that people lived and worked together. These tightly-knit local communities bred a fiercely independent working class, who found a self-confident political voice in Chartism.

It may be that historians over the years since the end of Chartism have dwelt too much on the disunity of the movement. We might expect a degree of fragmentation to occur in a society without the means for mass communication and which was still in many ways a regionalised society, marked by suspicion of strangers, differences of dialect, and a comparative lack of labour mobility. What is surely remarkable is that, from such an apparently unpromising situation, the Chartists managed to construct a large-scale political movement, with a mass membership and a common programme.

Further reading


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THE NATURE OF CHARTISM

In this penetrating essay Hugh Cunningham reinterprets the nature of the Chartist movement in Britain in the 1830s and 1840s, and the causes of its subsequent decline.

Chartism has been the subject of considerable debate over the past decade, leading to a reconsideration of the orthodoxy which was established in the 1960s. In that earlier perspective, Chartism was seen as a movement of a working class which in a variety of ways was too immature to sustain itself. All but one of the six constitutional points of the Charter were eventually to be enacted, but none of them in the lifetime of Chartism itself. Chartism therefore came to be thought of as a perhaps inevitable, perhaps noble failure.

It was not difficult, within this perspective, to accumulate a significant number of causes of failure. Chartism, it was said, was an economic cause masquerading as a political one, and it had strength only when economic conditions were bad, in the late 1830s, in 1842 and in 1848. Once economic conditions improved, Chartism faded away.

Insofar as it was a political movement, Chartism was seen as a product of the disenchantment between the working classes and the Whig government after 1832. The Reform Act of 1832, which gave the vote to the middle but not to the working classes, was followed by a succession of measures which might have been designed to alienate any remaining working-class goodwill. They included the 1833 Irish Coercion Act (there were links between Irish nationalists and British radicals, and it was feared that coercion thought suitable for the Irish might soon be applied on the mainland); the 1833 Factory Act, a government measure which deliberately set aside vociferous demands for a ten-hour day; the 1834 transportation of the Tolpuddle martyrs with its attack on the rights of trade unionists; the 1835 Act which allowed boroughs to set up their own police forces, for the police were seen as quite alien to British traditions of freedom; and above all, the passage and implementation of the Poor Law Amendment Act of 1834. These government measures called forth a massive degree of resistance which was to culminate in the publication of the People's Charter, the organisation of the first National Petition, and the elections for the first Convention. But, as the Keuningston Common 'fiasco' of 1848, where Chartists were met by over 95,000 representatives of the law.
with the economy, it was argued that once the conditions which had given rise to Chartism were removed, Chartism itself disintegrated.

For the Chartist, it was said, could not call on a united working class; their support came from disparate groups with different objectives: the handloom weavers in a declining trade had little in common with factory workers or with skilled artisans, and the chances of these three groups acting in unison were slim. Furthermore, it was claimed that Chartism could be understood only in a local, not a rational context; in different towns and regions people calling themselves Chartists had quite different objectives, and quite different means of achieving their cause. Nothing but the name of Chartist held together the Christian Chartists of Scotland and the advanced thinkers of the East London Democratic Federation. Not surprisingly, all these differences were reflected in a divided leadership and conflicting strategies. Moral force was counterposed to physical force, the demand for justice investors embedded in the persons of William Lovett and Feargus O'Connor; the latter, indeed, with his rhetoric of physical force, his ambition, his diversifying land plan, and his ultimate anarchy was often credited with much of the blame for the failure of Chartism.

These 'causes of failure' could be and often were expanded to fill a whole essay. From the moment of its inception, Chartism was seen as in decline, hastening towards its doom. In some accounts, there was not much to be said for Chartism after the winter of 1839-40; the two later peaks in 1842 and 1848 were treated as mere repetitive episodes, and the survival of Chartism into the 1850s was written out of the script. All this, explicitly or implicitly, stood in marked contrast with the 'success' of the middle-class Anti-Corn Law League, for the Corn Laws were repealed in 1846. Modern historians would not attribute failure entirely or even mainly to the activity of the League, but it was easier to draw the conclusion that success in politics in the 1840s by those middle-class, well-organised, and single issue pressure groups, rather than with attempts to mobilise the masses on behalf of what would have amounted to a revolution in the political system.

THE TRADITION OF RADICAL POLITICS

A fuller understanding of Chartism requires a longer historical perspective. In organising resistance to the government in the 1830s, the Chartists were able to draw on a tradition of popular radicalism which dated back at least as far as John Wilkes in the 1760s. At the heart of that radicalism lay a sense of history. The publication and immense popularity of Tom Paine's The Rights of Man had enabled people since the 1790s to base their political demands on natural rights, but British radicals simply added new weapons to their existing armoury, which was rooted in the belief that before the Norman Conquest there had been a democratic constitution in Britain. British history since 1666 was interpreted as a series of moves to bring back democracy, for example at the time of Magna Carta, or in the great struggles of the seventeenth century. The task of radicalism was to continue the process of restoring that constitution. Radicals resolved themselves into 'patriots', as people devoted to the true interests of their country, in contrast to a government which was the embodiment of corruption. 'Old Corruption' was the name William Cobbett and others gave to the British state. This kind of thinking was deeply embedded in Chartism and its precursors. In the campaign for shorter hours of work, some radicals demanded an eight-hour day on the grounds that good King Alfred had divided the 24 hours into eight for work, eight for sleep, and eight for recreation. The name 'Alfred' adorned the titles of campaigning newspapers. Food and drink — roast beef, plum pudding, and ale — were further symbols of the times which had once existed and which ought to be restored. Historians have made much of the speeches which Joseph Raynor Stephens delivered at Kersal Moor outside Manchester in September 1838, when he said that Chartism was a 'knife-and-fork question'. They have also chuckled descendingly at the Chartist of Trowbridge in Wiltshire who promised his audience that if the Charter was enacted there would be 'buckets of roast beef, plum pudding, and strong beer by working three hours a day'. The implication is that Chartism appealed to people's bellies and not their reason, and that in a place like Trowbridge people had no real understanding of democratic politics. The symbolic language of food, however, pervaded all sections of Chartism. George Julian Harney, often taken as representative of the left wing of Chartism, demanded universal suffrage in a speech in 1839 because it is our right, and not only because it is our right, but because we believe it will bring freedom to our country and happiness to our homesteads: we believe it will give us bread and beef and beer. In August 1840 at a great banquet in the Manchester Hall of Science, held to celebrate the release from prison of two Chartists, one person shouted, 'Oh, the roasts, the beef of Old England', and on the menu were plum puddings — for which there was a 'bit of a scramble'.

The six points of the Charter, then, were part of a political programme which dated back to the eighteenth century and which, if enacted, would bring an end to 'Old Corruption', and restore the long-eroded liberties of Britain. To assist in this restoration the Chartists insisted on another right, the right to bear arms. Harney had continued his speech by reminding his audience that time was when every Englishman had a musket in his cottage, and along with it hung a flitch of bacon. Now there was so flitch of bacon for there was no musket; let the musket be restored and the flitch of bacon would soon follow.

This could easily be categorized as a 'physical force' speech. But the entire Rise of Chartism insisted on this right to bear arms. The moderate newspaper, The Chartist, argued that 'reconcile to physical force to free themselves from arbitrary government', and urged its readers to 'remain your arms thus', for it is possible that you may have to use them in your own defence, with the other arm stretched across your breast'. So deeply imbued were Chartists with the notion that the state was corrupt, that they saw themselves as defenders of the constitution, fighting, if they must, under the watchwords of 'Peace, Law, Order' — a phrase used approvingly by both Harney and The Chartist.

CHARTISM AND THE ECONOMY

It is only by understanding the elements that went into the making of Chartism that we can begin to grasp the causes of its decline. They are more complex than the simple emphasis on the movement's vulnerability to improvements in the economy. For this reason Chartism was also dependent on the boom, on which this argument leans, turning out to be something of a myth. Economic historians of the period from 1850 to 1873 now argue that the economic boom was not sustain able in that period as in the preceding 20 years, and that such a rise in living standards as occurred was concentrated almost exclusively in the late 1860s and early 1870s; the pattern of slump and boom continued, with particularly bad slumps in 1858 and 1866, providing a rule-breaking ground for a movement such as Chartism had been — but was no longer. It is out of the 14 years between 1851 and 1864 real wages were at or below the level of 1850. The straightforward economic explanation of the collapse of Chartism begins to look less than convincing.

It is possible, of course, that there may have been more complex changes in the economy which affected the viability of Chartism. Certainly the boom in railway building, with the stimulus which it gave to the iron, steel and coal industries, helped to stabilise capitalism and to give it a broader base than the textile industry. At the same time, employers began to introduce wage management techniques based on an acceptance of 10-hour hours of work; the 1847 Ten Hours Act may be said to mark this point. Thereafter, employers aimed to increase productivity within working hours by giving some workers the authority to act as pacemakers. In the 1970s and early 1980s it was frequently argued that these changes had led to the emergence of a new form of 'labour aristocracy' consisting of some 10 or 15% of the workers who were cut off from the rest by superior wages and better working conditions. Such people might be in other circumstances have provided the leadership for a working-class movement, but as it was, it was argued, they tended to see things through their employers' eyes. Few historians would now endorse this view of the importance of a 'labour aristocracy'. In practice it proved difficult to identify labour aristocrats, and often, when identified, they turned out to be more conservative than one might have expected. Even a relatively sophisticated
economic explanation for the decline of Chartism leaves many issues unresolved.

**CHARTISTS AND POLITICS**

In these circumstances historians have turned to more political explanations. Chartism, as we have seen, arose out of a long political tradition; within that tradition there was not only a common set of political presuppositions, but also an agreement on the strategies to be employed in the face of 'Old Corruption'. If the people could be assembled in big enough masses, it was argued, the government would be forced to concede. There were various ways in which what we would now call 'people power' could be demonstrated. Petitions, signed by millions, and presented to Parliament by a sympathetic MP, had a long history as a means of presenting a grievance. In Chartism they were backed up by mass public meetings. Chartism indeed, in this perspective, was not a series of local campaigns, but essentially a national one. Its petitions were national in scope; in the Northern Star it had a national newspaper, selling at its height 50,000 copies, and perhaps reaching one million readers or listeners— for it was often read aloud. In the National Charter Association with its 400 locales and 50,000 members, it had what was arguably the first national political organisation. Finally, in Feargus O'Connor, the inspiration of the National Charter Association, it had a national leader. As a national movement, representing the people, Chartists believed it legitimate to call a duly-elected anti-parliament, a convention, supposedly more representative of the people than the parliament which sat at Westminster.

Such was Chartism at its height. But there were two difficulties which such a strategy of mass mobilisation always faced. The first was that parliament and government would simply refuse to accept 'people power' at face value; that they would reject the petitions and mock them. If that happened, what were the Chartists to do? It was this issue which led inevitably to divisions, with some supporting an armed uprising, others talking of a national strike in the form of a 'sacred month', and others more cautiously recommending a reconsideration of tactics. The second potential difficulty was that the government would meet the Chartists on their own ground, and to the Chartists numbers countered their own. This was what happened on 10 April 1848 at Kennington Common; the Chartists who wished to present their petition were confronted in London by 1,000 soldiers, 4,000 police and 85,000 special constables sworn in for the occasion. As one contemporary put it, the Chartists 'made number their argument and it recoiled upon themselves'. The 'sacoo' of Kennington Common in 1848 is seen by many as the end of Chartism. It did indeed mark the end of the tactic of the 'mass platform', the attempt to gain Chartist ends by sheer force of numbers. Thereafter Chartists resorted either to conspiracy, or, as many had already done, to a policy of mutual self-improvement which would eventually convince the governing classes that working men could be admitted to the vote.

**THE ROLE OF THE STATE**

The resort to a more quixotic politics reflected two somewhat contradictory trends of the 1840s. The first was that Chartists of all kinds had been brought face to face with the sheer power of the state. 20 people had died in the Newport rising of November 1839; over 500 Chartists, including Lovett, had been 'detained' between June 1839 and June 1840. To be an active Chartist was to be at constant risk of imprisonment. Not surprisingly, this affected the ability of the movement to sustain itself; many Chartists fled to America, to what they saw as a freer political climate.

But alongside this repressive side of state action lay something which historians increasingly call 'the liberalisation of the state', in one sense this simply meant cleaning up 'Old Corruption' — doing away with the paraphernalia of jobs for which people had been paid taxpayers' money without doing very much in return. More positively, the government, particularly under the premiership of Sir Robert Peel between 1841 and 1846, began to govern in what seemed to be the interests of the people as a whole. Taxes on consumption were reduced; the Coal Mines Act of 1842 and the Ten Hours Act of 1847 did seem to offer protection to some categories of workers; there was some state money made available for education and for public libraries. Peel himself was seen to be a 'statesman' rather than a mere 'politician', and it became increasingly difficult to think of the state as 'Old Corruption'.

Chartism found it hard to operate in this new political climate. The language which it had inherited from the radical traditions had lost its relevance. By the late 1840s those who talked about roast beef, or the Anglo-Saxon constitution, or the Englishman's right to bear arms, seemed to belong to an age that had passed. Chartism had to be seen as better seen as an end than a beginning. It brought to a head the eighteenth-century radical conception of the oppositional relationship between the people and the state. Once the state had transformed itself by a combination of repression and reform, Chartism no longer had a role to play. It attempted in the late 1840s and 1850s to help the workers; it assembled the Liberal party in which the Liberal factory owners were the enemy, others still can be linked to the socialist politics of the 1880s. In time five of the Charter's six points were to become part of the law of the land. But it is only hindsight, with its attendant distortion of time which permits us to trace these links with the future. The five points were achieved not because the Chartists had voiced them; rather, they were conceded by a state which had defeated Chartism with a mixture of stick and carrot, and which no longer felt threatened. After 1848 the fear of revolution receded sharply in Britain. New dangers came to confront the state. There is no clearer sign of the new mood of politics, and of the way in which Chartism had been consigned to the past, than the emergence in 1859-60 of a Volunteer Force to defend Britain's shores against French invasion; most of its members were working class, and they enjoyed the privilege of taking their rifles home with them. One of the Chartists' demands had been met, but the government could now be confident that the arms were for use against an external enemy rather than the state itself. The Chartist era was over.

**FURTHER READING**

Josse, D. J. V. (1978) Chartism and the Chartist, Lane.

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