Chartism's electoral strategy and the bifurcation of Radicalism, 1837-1852

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Chartism's direct and extensive engagement with electoral politics received little attention from historians until the analysis of 'Labour's Candidates' by Malcolm Chase in 2009.[1] As Chase highlights, there were forty-two Chartist electoral candidatures for Parliament between 1839 and 1860, a number that did not include the movement's figurehead and after 1847 MP for Nottingham Feargus O'Connor, and numerous other candidates who appeared on the hustings but retired prior to polling.[2] Electioneering was consequently a 'serious initiative' that should not be dismissed as opportunism or dilettantism.[3] This has broken new ground and provided a new avenue for studying not only Chartism but also the history of working-class Radical electioneering, which is more widely seen as developing in the 1860s.[4] Despite this, it is not a comprehensive study of Chartism's electoral strategy. Chase effectively dates the origin of Chartist electioneering to the formation of the National Charter Association (NCA) in 1840 and the subsequent Chartist intervention at the 1841 General Election, while the majority of the text focusses on the period after the formation by the NCA in 1846 of the National Central Registration and Election Committee (NCREC), an ambitious but ultimately unsuccessful attempt to centralise the recruitment and organisation of Chartist candidates. In doing so 'Labour's Candidates', despite its innovation and detail, is consistent with a pre-existing historiographical focus on the role of O'Connor and the 1841 General Election in Chartist electioneering.[5]

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1 Malcolm Chase, "Labour's Candidates': Chartist Challenges at Parliamentary Polls, 1839-1860' *Labour History Review* 74, no 1 (April, 2009), 64-89.
2 Chase, "'Labour's Candidates'", 81-3.
3 Chase, "'Labour's Candidates'", 79.
4 Royden Harrison, *Before the Socialists: Studies in Labour and Politics, 1861 to 1881* (London, 1965); James Owen, *Labour and the Caucus: Working-class Radicalism and Organised Liberalism in England , 1868-1888* (Liverpool, 2014).
5 James Epstein, *The Lion of Freedom: Feargus O'Connor and the Chartist Movement, 1832-1842* (London, 1982), 276-286; Paul Pickering, *Feargus O'Connor: A Political Life* (Monmouth, 2008), 116-142; Betty Kemp, 'The General Election of 1841' *History* 37:130 (June, 1952), 146-157.

This article will build on these studies of Chartism's Parliamentary electoral politics by outlining how this electioneering directly derived from the intervention of popular Radicals in the 1837 General Election, when proto-Chartist organisations made concerted efforts to support candidates who advocated what would become the six points of the People's Charter. Born of intense disillusionment with the large number of Liberal MPs elected in the 1835 General Election, this strategy was developed with the objective of forming an ultra-Radical Parliamentary faction that was distinct from the Whigs and accepted the leadership of an extra-Parliamentary mass movement. A series of meetings and publications refining this strategy culminated in the People's Charter, and consequently one of the foundational objectives of the movement was the formation of this Parliamentary faction. This strategic purpose of the People's Charter has been overlooked by historians of Chartism, who like Dorothy Thompson see its 'main contribution' as 'an elaborate exposition of the methods for the implementation of a system of universal male suffrage' in the form of a draft Parliamentary Bill. The consequent strategy in the movement's first years was to organise a petition for its implementation.[6] This petitioning and its associated agitation was in fact an attempt to directly and decisively alter the composition of Parliament, demonstrating that Chartism was extremely politically ambitious from the outset, a fact that has been obscured by the lack of attention within Chartist historiography to the 1837 General Election.[7] This article will therefore begin by outlining how Parliamentary electioneering was a much more fundamental and foundational aspect of Chartism than even Chase suggests.

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6 Dorothy Thompson, *The Chartists: Popular Politics in the Industrial Revolution* (London, 2013), p. 39; Malcolm Chase, *Chartism: A New History* (Manchester, 2009), 7-9.

7 There is no mention of the General Election in Thompon's 'The Politics of the Reformed Parliament' in *The Chartists,* 9-26 or her chronology of Chartism in *The Early Chartists* (London, 1971), 38. The illuminating debate between R.J. Rowe and Iowerth Prothero in *Past and Present* also does not involve the 1837 General Election: 'The London Working Men's Association and the "People's Charter"', *Past and Present* 36:1 (April, 1967), 73-86, and 38:1 (December, 1967), 169-73. Malcolm Chase mentions the 1837 General Election only briefly: *Chartism: A New History* (Manchester, 2009), 14.

This has important consequences for how we perceive Chartism's subsequent relationship towards Liberal organisations, MPs, and electoral candidates. For Chase Chartism's endorsement of candidates pledged to support the People's Charter in Parliament illustrates that there 'was far greater scope for creative co-operation with radical liberals than historians of the movement have supposed', a fact that facilitated the development of popular Liberalism in the decades following the end of Chartism. He further suggests that the cynicism directed towards Radical Liberal MPs was more an idiosyncrasy of O'Connor's than a wider sentiment within the movement. This position is shared by studies of Radical and Chartist electioneering focussed on the local level, and conforms to a body of scholarship that has strongly emphasised Chartism's role in a much longer Radical continuity.[8] Focussing on the level of national strategy, this article will outline how Chartist support for Liberal MPs and electoral candidates operated according to the schismatic principles and objectives developed in 1837. This required pressuring the Radical Liberals into accepting Chartism's programme and leadership, a strategy most clearly successful with the MP for Finsbury, Thomas Slingsby Duncombe, who modelled himself as Chartism's Parliamentary representative.[9] Integral to this was a corresponding bifurcation with moderate 'Whig-Radical' Liberals which Chartists pursued directly on the hustings alongside a denigration of their electoral and political culture, in particular their use of electoral corruption. The rise of the middle-class Complete Suffrage Union (CSU) in 1842 complicated this strategy due to their independent adoption of Chartism's programme, electoral strategy, and commitment to electoral purity, a development that directly threatened Chartism's key objective of controlling Parliamentary Radicalism, making the CSU a more persistent

8 Chase, 'Labour's Candidates', 79-81; Benjamin Weinstein, *Liberalism and Local Government in Early Victorian London* (Woodbridge, 2011); Katrina Navickas, *Protest and the Politics of Space and Place, 1789-1848* (Manchester, 2016), 154-176; Eugenio F. Biagiani, *Liberty, Retrenchment and Reform: Popular Liberalism in the Age of Gladstone, 1860-1880* (Cambridge, 1992).

9 Jamie Bronstein, 'Thomas Slingsby Duncombe, the "Member for All England": Representing the Non-voter in the Chartist Decade', *Labour History Review* 80:2 (2015), 109-134.

danger for Chartism than historians have realised.[10] This article will outline how Chartism successfully contained this threat by tactically supporting, ignoring, or opposing CSU candidates, depending upon which was necessary to maintain the appearance of Chartist predominance.

Chartist co-operation with some Liberals and opposition to others was, therefore, part of an over-arching strategy of seeking Chartist leadership over Parliamentary Radicalism. Consequently, historians should be wary of interpreting Chartist electioneering as an area of enthusiastic collaboration with Parliamentary Liberalism, since a foundational strategy of Chartism required any co-operation with Liberal politicians to be entirely on Chartist terms, a pose that confounded Liberal efforts to form a united Radicalism.[11] This fact is not immediately obvious, and Chartism's varied attitudes towards Liberal candidates can appear capricious unless the origins, purpose, and substantive importance to the movement of the 1837 electoral strategy is taken into account. Investigation of this 'creative co-operation' therefore reveals it to be a contingency that illustrates the centrality of anti-Liberalism to Chartist strategy and culture, a fact that has important implications for our understanding of Chartism's legacy and the rebirth of working-class Radical electioneering in the 1860s.

The 1837 General Election and the People's Charter

The direct antecedents of Chartist electioneering were the first elections of the reformed Parliament between November 1832 and January 1833, when working-class Radical organisations who had been active in the Reform agitation sought to return candidates in a number of borough constituencies. Of these the most successful were in Bath and Oldham, despite concerted efforts to capture

[10] Discussion of the rivalry between the Chartists and CSU focusses on 1842: Chase*, Chartism*, 198-201, 208-9, 227-9; Thompson, *The Chartists*, 185-9. The closest to a focused study of the CSU is Alex Tyrell, *Joseph Sturge and the Moral Radical Party in Early Victorian Britain* (London, 1987).
[11] Michael J. Turner, '"Sensible Chartism" and the Chimera of Radical Unity' *Albion: A Quarterly Journal Concerned with British Studies* 33:1 (2001), 51-74.

London's eight, mostly new, constituencies.[12] In the following years London's Radicals successfully organised to implement the provisions of the 1831 Vestries Act, which allowed democratic control of vestries and with that control of voter registration, and success in this along with tenacious electioneering for Parliamentary seats led to Marylebone, Finsbury, Westminster, and Southwark all returning Radical candidates before or during the 1835 General Election, when the *Poor Man's Guardian* heralded the election of over 100 'true Radicals and Liberals' to Parliament.[13] Buoyed by this optimism, Radical energy became focussed on co-ordinating with these MPs, first with the Marylebone Radical Association (MRA) in late 1835 and then the London Working Men's Association (LWMA) in the summer of 1836.[14] This gave way to cynicism as the 1835 Parliament progressed, with many Radicals increasingly critical of the moderation of Joseph Hume and Daniel O'Connell, the leaders of English and Irish Parliamentary Radicalism. The proximity of both men to the Whig Government earned them the epithet of 'Whig-Radicals', a pejorative term that both men accepted.[15] This left a small group of MPs representing constituencies with well-organised Radical electors and non-electors who consequently distanced themselves from the Whigs and supported popular causes, including extensive Parliamentary reform. Most notable of these were Duncombe and his partner for Finsbury Thomas Wakley, John Fielden in Oldham, and the Benthamite 'Philosophic Radicals', with the MP for Bath J.A. Roebuck their most Radical and, until his advocacy of the new Poor Laws, popular Parliamentarian.[16]

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12 *Cobbett's Weekly Political Register,* December 22 1832; Stewart Angas Weaver*, John Fielden and the Politics of Popular Radicalism* (Oxford, 1997)*,* 53-80; R.S. Neale, *Bath, 1680-1850: A Social History*, (Boston, 1981), 329-369.
13 Weinstein, *Liberalism and Local Government*, 39-69; Thomas Murphy, *A letter to the Radicals of the United Kingdom*…(London, 1838), 4-5; James Williamson Brooke, *The Democrats of Marylebone* (London, 1839), iv, 31, 33-4, 139-40; *Poor Man's Guardian*, 17 January 1835; Prothero, *Artisans and Politics*, 307.
14 Prothero, *Artisans and Politics*, 324-325; J. Rowe ed. *London Radicalism: A Selection from the Papers of Francis Place* (London, 1970), 178-200; Minutes of the London Working Men's Association, British Library (hereafter BL) Add Ms. 37,773, 15 November 1836, 14 February 1837, ff. 23, 37.
15*Poor Man's Guardian*, 6 June 1835; *London Dispatch,* 16 October 1836, 29 January, 5 February 1837; *London Dispatch,* 16 December 1836; *London Mercury*, 18 September, 2, 16 October, 20 November 1836; Pickering, *Feargus O'Connor*, 70-1; Chase, *Chartism*, 9.
16 William Thomas, *The Philosophic Radicals: Nine Studies in Theory and Practice, 1817-1841* (London, 1979).

The LWMA have been depicted as co-operating deferentially with the Radical MPs and particularly 'compromised' by their proximity to the Benthamites who in most cases vocally supported the 1834 Poor Law Amendment Act. This attitude has been particularly associated with their secretary, William Lovett, who corresponded cordially with these MPs and along with Henry Hetherington wrote the Association's publications.[17] From the outset, however, the LWMA possessed a very poor regard for the Parliamentary Radicals and their contact with them was, instead, designed to pressure them into promoting the ultra-Radical programme.[18] In *The Rotten House of Commons*, an analysis of Parliament and discussion of the position the popular Radicals should adopt towards it published in November 1836, the LWMA argued that workers should 'test [MPs'] sincerity by their dropping all paltry questions of policy of expediency' in favour of a range of demands, including a free press, general education, and five of what would become the Charter's six points.[19] This began to take fruition as a concrete strategy early in 1837. At the beginning of February Hetherington's *London Dispatch*, in essence the paper of the LWMA, published an analysis of Parliament that divided the Radical MPs between Hume's 'Constitutional Radicals', described as 'the cat's paw of the Whigs', and the Benthamite 'Democratic Radicals', who supported extensive democratic reform but otherwise trailed the working-class 'social reformers' outside of Parliament. Arguing that '[n]othing can come of nothing' the *Dispatch* contended that it was only '[o]ut of Parliament that the people have much to hope', and to these ends in the same month the LWMA developed a public petition for reform to be presented by Roebuck, for which they organised a large public meeting.[20] In May, it was agreed to put together a committee to write these principles up into a draft Bill, and a group of Radical MPs were subsequently invited to ascertain how prepared they were 'to make exertions for

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17 David Goodway, *London Chartism 1838-1848* (London, 1982), 23; Thompson, *The Chartists*, 23; Prothero*, Artisans and Politics*, 310-27.
18 Francis Place Papers, Add Ms. 35151, Lovett to Place, 23 May, 1 June 1840.
19 *The Rotten House of Commons*…(London, 1836), 6-7.
20 *London Dispatch*, 5 February 1837; Minutes of the LWMA, BL Add Ms. 37,321, February 1837, f. 38.

carrying those principles into practice' that they professed to hold in their speeches and writings.[21] Only eight attended this meeting, of whom three, including Hume, declined to support the petition and Bill. The remaining five became along with Roebuck the MPs who were to write the People's Charter with six members of the Association.[22] Although often depicted as convivial these meetings were assembled, in Lovett's words, 'for the purpose of inducing professors of radical principles to adopt and contend for some *definite plan of reform*'. As Mark Hovell noted this relationship was mutually 'lukewarm', with the LWMA 'suspicious and very jealous' of these MPs, who they feared would betray them as they had been in 1832 by the disappointingly conservative Reform Act.[23]

This strategy of scrutinising Radical MPs by presenting them with a clear ultra-Radical programme was supported by Radicals outside of the LWMA, the most important of which was the Central National Association (CNA), the successor to the MRA, in which Bronterre O'Brien and Feargus O'Connor were the central figures. In his *London Mercury* O'Brien initially outlined a similar position to the LWMA of supporting the Philosophic Radicals as the most democratic of the Radicals and expressing opposition to O'Connell and Hume's moderation and co-operation with the Whigs.[24] By February, also like the LWMA, O'Brien argued that these MPs' ineffectiveness would only be overcome by them uniting as an independent party behind a single Bill advocating suffrage extension, the ballot, shorter Parliaments, and the end of property qualifications, and when a week later he attended the LWMA's public meeting proposing an even more extensive programme and strategy he reported that 'I often despaired of Radicalism before; I will never despair again'.[25] This enthusiasm was, however, dented by a speech of Roebuck's defending the new Poor Laws, but by

21 Francis Place Papers, BL Add Ms. 35,151, Place to Perry, 4 October 1838, f. 104.
22 Minutes of the LWMA, Add Ms. 37,773, 23 May 1837, f. 50.
23 Mark Hovell, *The Chartist Movement* (Manchester, 1918), 74; William Lovett, *A Letter to Daniel O'Connell* (London, 1843) 4.
24 *London Mercury,* 11 December 1836, 8, 15, 22, 29 January 1837.
25 *London Mercury,* 5, 26 February, 5 March 1837.

the General Election that summer this hostility was tempered as both the LWMA and O'Brien advocated direct electoral participation directed against 'Whig-Radicals' and for the six points.[26] To these ends the *London Mercury* supported a slate of CNA candidates in chiefly northern towns and cities with strong Radical and anti-Poor Law movements, including future Chartist leaders O'Connor, Augustus Hardin Beaumont, George Julian Harney, and Edmund Smallwood, alongside O'Brien himself.[27]

The LWMA leadership were by this point experienced with electioneering, having canvassed, registered electors, and worked on electoral committees for Radical candidates since 1832.[28] They responded to the General Election by putting in place the strategy of pressurising Radical candidates that they had first outlined in *The Rotten House of Commons*. This was described in more detail in a pamphlet distributed prior to the election, which outlined the principles agreed at the February meeting and the outcome of the meeting in May with the Radical MPs. Anger with those Parliamentarians who had declined to support the six points was clearly expressed:

> In the recent exertions we have made among those called the *Liberal Members of Parliament,* we regret to find that a considerable number of them (who even admit the justice of those great principles, and consider them essential to the well-being of society) timidly shrink from the performance of a most sacred duty, apprehensive of the ignorance, prejudice, or selfishness of their constituents; are indeed fearful of losing their seats in Parliament.

To combat this electors and non-electors were instructed to 'not shrink from the task of examining and exposing every shuffling candidate, who, from whatever pretext, seeks to perpetuate exclusive

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[26] *London Mercury,* 12 March, 9 July 1837.
[27] *London Mercury*, 9, 16, 23 July 1837.
[28] Weinstein, *Liberalism and Local Government*, 39-69; Murphy, *A letter to the Radicals*; *The Democrats of Marylebone*; William Carpenter, *The Elector's Manual; comprising. . . information . . . connected with the exercise of the franchise . . . with the necessary instructions to the new constituency* (London, 1832).

legislation', while the necessity of forming political Associations and only working to elect proponents of the six points was emphasised.[29] This was repeated in a shorter address published in the *London Dispatch* during the election, in which the LWMA argued that Radical workers should 'attend every hustings, and in unmeasured tones denounce every candidate who does not openly and explicitly' declare himself for the full six points, before forming unions that maintained pressure on Parliament.[30] Although explicitly opposed to the new Poor Laws the LWMA argued that Radicals should prioritise supporting any advocate of the six points. The CNA, meanwhile, supported two anti-Poor Law Tories who did not support universal suffrage.[31] This division should not, however, be overstated, as the General Election was generally a co-operative period for these two groups. O'Brien otherwise praised the LWMA strategy, their pamphlet explaining how to register as electors, and pursued the same strategy of returning '*a dozen or two of real democratic members in the house*'. He even recommended constituencies apply to the LWMA for candidates, specifically endorsing key members Lovett, Henry Vincent, and Robert Hartwell.[32]

The election returned a minority Whig Government even more dependent upon the support of the reduced Liberal party. Criticism of this compact continued, with the *London Mercury* declaring that there was never an 'election of less promise to the people', while the *London Dispatch* described the new Parliament as 'moribund', with 'five-sixths' of the reformers 'in fact only people-eating Whig wolves in the garb of democracy'.[33] However, in November the Government responded to a resolution for reform proposed by Wakley by stating the 1832 Act was 'final', which drove a number of the more Radical MPs and candidates towards the position of the LWMA and CNA.[34] The

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29 *Address of the Working Men's Association to the Radical Reformers of Great Britain on the Upcoming Elections* (London, 1838), 7.
30 *London Dispatch,* 9 July 1837.
31 *London Dispatch,* 7 May 1837; BL Add MS. 27819, ff. 43-5, Add MS. 35151, ff. 21-2.
32 *London Mercury*, 23 July 1837; *London Dispatch*, 23 July 1837.
33 *London Mercury* 30 July 1837; *London Dispatch,* 27 August 1837.
34 *Joseph Hume: The People's M.P.* (Philadelphia, 1985), 108-9.

prominent Liberal T.P. Thompson, who turned down invitations to stand in the General Election so as to not divide the Whig vote, felt personally betrayed and angrily pledged in the future to stand against Whigs.[35] By January 1838 the *Weekly True Sun*, owned by the MP for Southwark Daniel Whittle Harvey, stated that a 'determined opposition of *twenty* Radicals' should oppose both the Whigs and Tories, with even one 'decided democrat' MP more useful than 'half a dozen timid Whig-Radicals'.[36] This growing split was completed by the Marylebone by-election in March 1838, when Thompson was put up by the CNA and LWMA member Thomas Murphy as an opponent of Hume's pro-Poor Law ally William Ewart.[37] Local anger with the Whig-Radical coalition represented by Ewart and Thompson's splitting of the vote allowed the Tory candidate to win, producing a bitter public dispute. Thompson attributed his loss to his betrayal by 'Joseph Hume and the Middle Classes', a position echoed in the analysis of O'Connor's *Northern Star*.[38]

It was during this period that Lovett finished the People's Charter, a process begun early in February 1837. The body of the People's Charter was a draft Bill designed to show how to implement the six points in law, while its introduction is a notably unstudied document despite being a key statement of strategy. It is evident that this introduction was partially a reworking of the LMWA's earlier electoral material. In the address on the 1837 General Election, the LWMA made it clear that the purpose of the People's Charter was a document that would demarcate the genuine radicals by forming 'a rallying point for Radical Reformers, *a standard by which to test all those who call themselves friends of the people*' It was also intended to be produced and distributed 'in the course of a few weeks',

[35] Francis Place Papers, BL Add Ms. 37,949, Thompson to Place, 12 February 1838, f. 380.
[36] *Weekly True Sun*, 7, 14 January 1838.
[37] *Weekly True Sun,* 25 February 1838.
[38] Francis Place Papers, BL Add Ms. 31515, Place to Samuel Harrison, 4 March 1838, f. 77; L. G. Johnson, *General T. Perronet Thompson: 1783-1869* (London, 1957), 218-20; Murphy, *Letter,* 5, 7, 8, 16-19; *The Spectator* (London, 1838), Vol. XI, 227; *Northern Star*, 10 March 1838.

which would have been in time for the General Election.[39] This context is clear from the Charter's introduction, which lambasted at length those MPs who had abandoned reform:

> We have heard eloquent effusions in favour of political equality, from the hustings and the senate-house, suddenly change into prudent reasonings on property privileges, at the winning smile of a minister. We have seen depicted, in glowing language, bright patriotic promises of the future, which have left impressions on us more lasting than the perfidy or apostacy of the writers. We have seen one zealous Reformer after another desert us, as his party was triumphant, or his interests served. We have perceived the tone of those whom we have held as champions of our cause, lowered to the accommodation of selfish electors, or restrained by the slavish fear of losing their seats. We have, therefore, resolved to test the sincerity of the remainder, by proposing that something shall be done in favor of those principles they profess to admire.[40]

Like the address on the General Election the introduction called for a mass-movement outside of Parliament to unite behind the six points and demand the Bill became law, before stating that 'electors and non-electors will continue to make it the pledge of their candidates'.[41] The Charter was, therefore, part of a strategy not just of creating a mass-movement, but of *directly* forming a new Radical fraction in Parliament that backed the six points, including through electioneering. This is a crucial point: the early Chartists were not solely initiating a petitioning movement that sought MPs who would present the Charter, but actively sought to lead those MPs in a split from the Whig-Radicals and towards a unified ultra-Radical programme. Electoral politics and the aspiration of forming a Parliamentary party were therefore foundational to Chartism, and it quickly received from

[39] *Address…on the Upcoming Elections,* p. 6.
[40] *The People's Charter* (London, 1838), 1.
[41] *The People's Charter*, 2.

those pursuing the same objective, which included those in the CNA, disaffected ex-MPs like O'Connor and Thompson, and those of the 'Philosophic Radicals' who were dismayed with Hume.[42]

This strategy and programme was also accepted in the provinces. The regional Working Men's Associations that developed after national tours by LWMA members in 1837 and 1838 were considered serious electoral bodies in some constituencies, while in Carlisle the WMA stated their 'chief object' was the election of Chartists to local and Parliamentary positions.[43] Into this atmosphere the dissemination of the Charter by LWMA 'missionaries' was welcomed. In Bristol in June Henry Vincent, the LWMA's most effective lecturer, encapsulated the low regard for the MPs of the reformed Parliament by pointing out that 'of the 658 people's friends (laughter), they had got 11' to support the Charter, and mimicked their recent meeting with Richard Potter, the Radical MP for Wigan:

> …they found the old gentleman sitting in his chair, and his secretary standing beside him; when they had stated their object in waiting on him, he handed the charter to his secretary, and said, "Tell me, am I for these principles?" (laughter). The secretary put his glass to his eye, and ran them through – "Universal suffrage. No; you are not for that. Annual Parliaments. No; nor for that. No property qualification? No. Vote by ballot? Yes; you are for the ballot (laughter)." Mr. Potter then said, "Gentlemen, my secretary tells me I am for the ballot, and you had better go for that (roars of laughter."[44]

Vincent repeated this joke about how 'our present representatives [are] intelligent men' to similar success regularly throughout the summer, while depicting Hume's proposals for household suffrage

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42 Francis Place Papers, BL Add Ms. 35,510, Molesworth to Place, 5 October 1836; Place to Hume, 30 December 1836; Roebuck to Place 4 January 1837; Place to Grote, 23 August 1837; Sir William Molesworth, 'The Terms of the Alliance between the Radicals and Whigs', *The London and Westminster Review* (January, 1837).
43 Cited in Navickas, *Protest and the Politics of Space and Place,* 154; R.G. Gammage, *The History of the Chartist Movement* (London, 1894), 8.
44 *Bristol Mercury,* 16 June 1838.

as a reform that would benefit brothel owners but not workers.[45] This antipathy continued as the embryonic movement began organising the National Petition and the election of the National Convention to oversee it. The 'Sham-Radicals Liberals' who supported the Poor Laws were viewed with intense distaste by provincial Chartists, many of whom had spent years protesting the reforms and were now preparing for a violent confrontation should Parliament reject the Petition.[46] When Roebuck stood in a by-election for Glasgow a number of Chartists forced from him criticism of the Government's handling of Poor Law reform, a major victory.[47] Dismayed by the poverty they saw outside of London LWMA members became far more vocally critical of the reforms, prompting a number of pro-Charter Liberals, including Roebuck and William Sharman Crawford, to distance themselves from the movement.[48] The formation of the Anti-Corn-Law League (ACLL) in 1838 furthered this antipathy, as Chartists viewed it with some justification as a clique of capitalists interested in free trade as a means of driving down wages.[49]

The 1839 Convention itself was largely united, beyond an early dispute between the 'Jacobin' minority who pressed for near-insurrectionary action and those who wanted to exhaust the petitioning of Parliament first. Notably, however, the Convention had a consistently low opinion of Radical MPs. During one of its first debates, on whether or not to send deputations to potential Parliamentary supporters, delegates mocked these MPs and suggested that any co-operation with them would be seen as a conspiracy. An invitation the same week by Thompson to discuss uniting the ACLL with the Chartists was similarly rejected as a trick.[50] The fraction of trusted pro-Chartist

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45 *Northern Star*, 18 August 1838; *London Dispatch*, 5 August 1838.
46 *Northern Star* 8, 17 March 1838; *Northern Liberator*, 17 February 1838.
47 *Northern Star*, 7 July 1838.
48 William Lovett Autograph Book, BL Add Ms. 78,161 Roebuck to Lovett, 6 September 1838, f. 28; William Sharman Crawford to Lovett, 26 November 1838, f. 78; Thompson, *The Chartists*, pp. 22-3.
49 Paul Pickering and Alex Tyrell, *The People's Bread: A History of the Anti-Corn Law League* (London, 2000), 141-142.
50 *The Chartist*, 9 February, 31 March 1839; *Northern Liberator*, 12 February 1839; *The Operative,* 16, 17 February 1839; *The Charter*, 3 March 1839.

MPs had become so small that in March, Thomas Attwood, John Temple Leader, Wakley, Duncombe, Fielden and Harvey were the only invitees to a public dinner.[51] Of these, Attwood and Fielden were chosen to present the National Petition, but in May Attwood publicly rejected one of the Charter's points and along with Fielden infuriated the Convention by demanding they censure the 'Jacobin' contingent. In their private meetings with delegates both men were perceived as rude and disinterested, and they performed poorly when they finally presented the Petition to Parliament in July.[52] The next month the depleted Convention badly handled the strikes and demonstrations that they had planned as the 'ulterior measures' should the Petition be rejected. Amid the recriminations one delegate argued that 'it was your professed friends in the House, and not the Convention, that gave a check to the movement'.[53]

The Radical MPs had clearly failed the 'tests' set out in the People's Charter, and seemed unlikely to form a coherent Chartist faction. In response to this and the failures of the 'ulterior measures' a major debate began in the *Northern Star* in September over how to approach the next General Election. While O'Brien suggested the election of a semi-insurrectionary anti-Parliament, O'Connor argued for a legal strategy that he hoped would return 'a majority of the six hundred and fifty-eight', in other words the direct formation of a Chartist Parliamentary party, a position clearly based on the CNA one in 1837.[54] The debate was halted by the Newport Rising, further insurrections later in the winter, and the arrest of most of the movement's leadership. It was consequently not until September 1840 that these plans were returned to with the formation of the mass-member National Charter Association (NCA), the constitution of which recommended that Chartists present

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51 *Northern Star*, 16 March 1839.
52 *Northern Star,* 26 October 1839; Francis Place Papers, BL Add Ms. 35,144, Place to William Hoare 19 December 1839, f. 436.
53 *Northern Star*, 26 October 1839.
54 Chase, *Chartism,* 161; *London Democrat*, 27 April 1839. *Northern Star* 21, 28 September 1839, 6 March, 26 June 1841.

candidates at elections, particularly those 'legally qualified to sit in Parliament'.[55] This is interpreted by Chase as the moment when the uncoordinated and spontaneous handful of early Chartist appearances on the hustings was replaced by a much more focussed approach to electioneering.[56] Far from an innovation this in fact built upon Chartism's foundational strategy, and explains its subsequent posture towards Liberal MPs.

Chartism's electoral opposition to Liberalism, 1841-47

In May 1841, anticipating a General Election, the Chartist National Convention advised activists to support the Tories against the Whigs, and in June the Whig administration collapsed and O'Connor and the NCA sought to put this into effect.[57] As has been well-outlined by Chase and James Epstein, the purpose of this strategy was to reduce the number of Whigs in Parliament so that they would become an opposition reliant upon the support of Chartist MPs, and to these ends 'at the very least' 12 Chartist MPs needed to be returned. Although this met with some criticism, most localities prioritised finding Chartist candidates, while it was made clear that advocacy of Whig or Tory policies would be censured.[58] As with the election strategy itself this was far from new but instead born of a consensus developed in debates since 1837 and the Marylebone by-election that a Tory Government was a price worth paying for an independent ultra-Radical party that held the balance of power.[59] While in many constituencies Chartists put themselves forward as candidates, including in many cases those who had done so on the CNA slate in 1837, O'Connor and the *Northern Star* also followed the LWMA's position, outlined in the People's Charter itself, of endorsing seven

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55 *English Chartist Circular*, Vol 1 No 15; *Northern Star*, 10 July 1841.
56 Chase, 'Labour's Candidates', p. 67.
57 *McDouall's Chartist and Republican Journal*, May 22 1841; *English Chartist Circular*, Vol 1 No 19; *Northern Star*, 5 June 1841.
58 Epstein, *Lion of Freedom,* 276-286; Chase, 'Labour's Candidates', 69-70; *McDouall's Chartist and Republican Journal*, June 19 1841; *Northern Star* 12 June to 10 July 1841. For reports from localities and the leadership's addresses see *Northern Star*, 1, 15, 29 May, 5, 12 June 1841.
59 T.P. Thompson, *Exercises, Political and Others* (London, 1842), IV, 90; *Charter,* 2 June 1839; *Weekly True Sun,* 27 May 1839; *The Partition Principle: A List of British Parliamentary Constituencies, Where Radicals Might Influence the Seats in their Favour*…(London, 1840); Kemp, 'The General Election of 1841', 153-4.

Liberals pledged to enact the six points. To these ends O'Connor even endorsed Roebuck, whose support for the Poor Laws he had been extremely critical of. In doing so, it was made clear that along with the Chartist MPs these men would work to radicalise the more dormant Parliamentary Liberals and thereby split them from the Whigs.[60] The 1841 strategy was thereby an amalgamation of the CNA and LWMA's in 1837, with members of both now-defunct organisations standing as candidates. As with 1837 this helped foster unity, as many of these Chartists had only months before been accused by O'Connor of seeking to start a breakaway from Chartism he dubbed the 'New Move'.[61]

These endorsements were married to a strategy of directly opposing at the hustings Liberal candidates who remained in coalition with the Whigs, which came to form some of the central Chartist contests of the General Election. The sophistication of the Reform Club, established in 1836 to co-ordinate Radical candidates and increasingly the electoral centre of the Whig-Radical coalition, and the ACLL's decision to enter candidates in a number of by-elections in January 1841 were clear threats to Chartism's design to lead Parliamentary Radicalism.[62] In May Melbourne and Lord Russell, alarmed by potent Chartist opposition to the Whig candidate at the Nottingham by-election, conceded Corn Law reform as a sop to Radicals and the ACLL.[63] Chartists responded by organising in the constituencies recently targeted by the ACLL, and on the eve of the General Election *Northern Star* editorials re-asserted that the 'Charter is the only repealer'.[64] Subsequently a number of high-profile contests were fought between Chartist and ACLL candidates. In Stockport

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60 *Northern Star*, 24 June, 26 July 1841. These were William Sharman Crawford in Rochdale, T.P. Thompson at Hull, his son at Tower Hamlets, Roebuck at Bath, and John Gully for Halifax: *Northern Star*, 18 June 1842. Wakley and Duncombe were probably not on this list because they were unopposed in Finsbury.
61 *English Chartist Circular*, Vol 1 No 26; *Charter*, 30 June 1841; *Northern Star,* 19 June 1841; Vincent to Place, 3 June 1841, BL Add Ms 35151, fol. 344; Chase, *Chartism*, 168-178.
62 *Northern Star*, 30 January 1841.
63 *Northern Star*, 8, 22 May 1841; Kemp, 'The General Election of 1841', 154-5.
64 *Northern Star*, 29 May, 5,12, 19 June 1841.

Richard Cobden was denounced at a Chartist meeting as 'a middle class man only' who used violence to put down the Chartists, and during the election itself the Chartist candidate Jonathan Bairstow harangued Cobden as 'a regular Whig, a hypocrite, and a l—r'.[65] In Bolton Dr John Bowring, one of the six MPs on the committee formed in 1837 to draft the Charter, stood as the ACLL candidate but received furious opposition when he refused to pledge himself to all six points or factory reform.[66] In Leeds, the Humite Leeds Parliamentary Reform Association sought to replace the Benthamite Sir William Molesworth, who was retiring, with Hume and the merchant William Aldman.[67] Two Chartist candidates were brought forward, along with two more for the West Riding, who put up an energetic opposition.[68]

The 1841 General Election demonstrated that while pro-Chartist Liberals would be supported, moderate 'Whig-Radical' Liberals who refused to adopt the Charter would receive focussed Chartist opposition. This was followed with a persistent denigration of Liberal political morality and electoral culture. The General Election had been excessively corrupt, of which Chartists noted Liberals were equally guilty.[69] The mark for this had been set during the by-elections of January 1841 when the Reform Club's electoral agent, James Coppock, was sent by Joseph Parkes to help the ACLL by bribing electors. Their reputation was well-known from earlier contests, and both men were described at the 1841 Chartist Convention as being 'at the head and tail of the junta' that bought and sold seats for Liberal candidates.[70] In the months after the General Election the *Northern Star* disseminated stories of the extensive corruption utilised by these Liberals, which contrasted with the

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65 *Manchester Times,* 26 June 1841; *Northern Star,* 26 June, 10 July 1841.
66 *Northern Star*, 19 June, 10 July 1841.
67 *Northern Star*, 29 May 1841.
68 *Northern Star*, 5, 26 June.
69 *Odd Fellow*, 24 July 1841; *The Westminster Review*, Vol 39 (Feb-May 1843), 114.
70 Francis Place Papers, BL Add. Ms. 35151, J.B. Smith to Francis Place, 17 September 1841. J.B. Smith Election Letter-books, Volume III: Smith to Longsdon, 7 August 1837; Volume V: Cobden to Smith, 1, 3, 5, 12, 18, 24, 29 January 1841, Parkes to Cobden, 28 January 1841;Volume VI: Parkes to Smith, 13, 16, 25, 28 January 1841, Manchester Central Library; *Minutes of evidence, taken at the bar of the House of Commons, in the matter of the Ludlow election petition,* Parliamentary Papers, 90, (1840); *Northern Star,* 22 May 1841; Murphy, *Letter to the Radicals*, 15-16.

purity of the Chartist candidates. Chase notes that this lack of illegality and violence was unusual for this period and implies a rejection by Chartists of traditional local power structures. In fact, Chartists were particularly opposed to a newer infrastructure of electoral corruption being developed by the Liberal bourgeois interest in Parliament.[71] Gareth Stedman Jones has influentially outlined how Chartism adopted the Hanoverian discourse of 'Old Corruption', in which seats were controlled by landowners and financial capitalists and used to control Parliament in their interest, a discourse undercut by the Peelite reforms to the state and economy of the late 1840s.[72] This, however, does not account for the persistence of corruption in the areas that mattered to Chartism the most, constituencies and elections, which was not dealt with until the imperfect 1883 Bribery Act.[73] Although Chartists remained critical of this old system of 'borough-mongering', the establishment of electoral corruption in the industrial boroughs created in 1832 where Chartism and Liberalism directly competed was of much more central importance to the movement.[74]

Because they lacked well-established traditions of social control these new constituencies were 'nursed' by attorneys like Coppock using central funds to bribe and treat electors, often at enormous expense.[75] The reserves raised by the ACLL fundraising drives were similarly utilised for both legal electioneering and the corrupting and manufacturing of electors, as Chartists accurately alleged. An example of such 'nursing' was the market for votes O'Connor reported in the new constituency of Frome, where since bribery was 'loathsome to the mind of the "free-trader"' the local Liberals bought cabbages and teakettles from voters at heavily inflated prices, with £700 being given to 'a

71 Chase, 'Labour's Candidates', 71; J. Wasserman and E. Jaggard, 'Electoral violence in mid-nineteenth century England', *Historical Research* 80 (2007), 124–55; Frank O'Gorman, *Voters, Patrons, and Parties: The Unreformed Electoral System of Hanoverian England 1734-1832* (Oxford, 1989) and 'Campaign Rituals and Ceremonies: The Social Meaning of Elections in England, 1780-1860', *Past and Present* 135 (1992), 79-115.
72 Gareth Stedman Jones, *Languages of Class: Studies in English Working Class History* (Cambridge, 1982), 90–178.
73 Kathryn Rix, 'The Elimination of Corrupt Practices in British Elections'? Reassessing the Impact of the 1883 Corrupt Practices Act', *English Historical Review* 500 (February, 2008), 65-97.
74 *The Westminster and Foreign Quarterly Review* (April-July 1849), Vol. LI, 154.
75 *The Westminster and Foreign Quarterly Review* (April-July 1849), Vol. LI, 154-5.

rigid, religious, free-trade, justice-loving, purity-of-election, preaching dissenter, as cabbage and kettle money.'[76] This underlined a fundamental division between Chartism and the Liberalism of the Whig-Radicals. Despite both being advocates of the ballot, Parkes and Coppock had become convinced that the constituencies had become so corrupted that it was necessary to fight their 'political opponents with their own weapons'.[77] For Chartists such pragmatism was unthinkable, as electoral corruption was a direct means of debauching the people and thereby undermining their resistance to exploitation and tyranny. In countless addresses by both the national and local leaderships electoral corruption was decried as 'that alone which ensures the upholding of class interests', and to protect the political independence of the working class it was therefore necessary to oppose the demoralisation it caused. The principle of 'purity of election' therefore stood alongside the six points as integral to Chartism, and something expected of any endorsed candidate.[78]

This is integral to understanding why Chartism was particularly threatened by the onset of Complete Suffragism. The Complete Suffrage Union was formed at the end of 1841 by a group of ACLL members led by Joseph Sturge, a Quaker corn miller from Birmingham, who believed Chartism's electoral performance demonstrated universal suffrage would deliver Corn Law repeal. To these ends they sought unity with Chartists in a conference during May and April 1842.[79] However, they were far from a benign potential ally, and Sturge explicitly argued that their extra-political power as capitalists and employers ensured that universal suffrage 'would infallibly throw the mass of power into the hands of the middle classes.'[80] The CSU was a serious threat to Chartism not just because of

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76 Norman McCord, *The Anti-Corn Law League* (London, 1958), 152, 153, 155, 160-161, 172; *Northern Star*, 29 July 1843.
77 Jessie K. Buckley, *Joseph Parkes of Birmingham* (London, 1926), 169-77; Harriet Grote, *The Philosophic Radicals of 1832* (London, 1866), 26; *The Times*, 21 December 1857; *Punch* XXI (London, 1851), 214.
78 *Northern Star*, 26 March, 26 June 1841, 7 August 1841, 28 May, 1 June 1842; *National Association Gazette*, 28 May 1842; William Lovett and John Collins, *Chartism: A New Organisation of the People* (London, 1840), 6-7; *Northern Star*, 27 March 1841, 28 May 1842.
79 Epstein, *Lion of Freedom,* 285; *English Chartist Circular,* Vol 1 Nos 27, 30.
80 Joseph Sturge, *The Suffrage: An Appeal to the Middle Classes* (London, 1842), 8.

this pursuit of their class interests, but because they shared with Chartism its programme, Parliamentary ambitions, and criticism of corruption. While some Chartists were enticed by this alliance, most of the movement came to reject them in a second conference in December after it became clear CSU delegates sought to replace the Charter with a 'Bill of Rights', a clear assertion of their aspirations to dominate Chartism.[81] This was the beginning of an important, although largely unstudied, electoral rivalry between the NCA and CSU, both of whom sought to lead Parliamentary Radicalism. This began in the summer of 1842 when O'Connor, the NCA and the local Chartists intervened to support Sturge at the Nottingham by-election. This was one of many called after Roebuck sensationally revealed in Parliament a number of secret compromises made between MPs and their opponents in order to quash Parliamentary investigations into the extensive corruption during the General Election.[82] O'Connor, the NCA, and the local Chartists promptly intervened to support Sturge and organise closely with the Nottingham branch of the CSU. Although Sturge lost by 1801 votes to 1885 the by-election was widely celebrated as a moral victory.[83]

Considering that barely weeks earlier O'Connor had been attacking Sturge, many saw his support as a sign of his 'audacious inconsistency'.[84] This was of course consistent with the 1837 and 1841 strategies of supporting advocates of the six points, but also the People's Charter itself, which the Nottingham Chartists directly referenced when they described the election as a chance to test 'the sincerity of the Sturge party'.[85] A more important motive, however, was to limit Sturge's independence by making his candidacy their own. From the outset Sturge and other CSU speakers

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81 Chase, *Chartism*, 195-201; Thompson, *The Chartists*, 183-189; Tyrell, *Joseph Sturge*; Hovell, *The Chartist Movement*, 243-44.
82 *Report from the Select Committee on Election Proceedings,* Parliamentary Papers 458 (1842), pp. xii-xiv; *English Chartist Circular*, Vol 2, No 68; *National Association Gazette*, 14 May 1842; Robert Eadon Leader ed. *Life and Letters of John Arthur Roebuck* (London, 1897), 144-145; Gash, *Politics in the Age of Peel*, 126, 257-58; *McDouall's Chartist and Republican Journal*, 24 July 1841; Thomas Beggs, *History of the Election for the Borough of Nottingham, 1842* (Nottingham, 1842), 6-7.
83 *Northern Star*, 4 June 1842; Thomas Cooper, *The Life of Thomas Cooper* (London, 1872), 159-161; Beggs, *History*, 59.
84 Beggs, *History,* 9-10, 12; Richard Henry, *Memoires of Joseph Sturge* (London, 1864), 311, 315; Tyrell, *Joseph Sturge*, 127; Gammage, *History*, 208.
85 *Northern Star*, 14 May 1842.

made it 'a test on *purity of election*' and resolved that 'purity of election should on his part be preserved,' a direct appropriation of Chartism's performance of electoral purity in the 1841 General Election.[86] This was underpinned by a similar social critique of electoral corruption as Chartism's, and Sturge's immense popularity with Radicals due to his abolitionism.[87] By enthusiastically embracing his candidacy, O'Connor and the Chartists prevented the CSU from using the scandal to establish themselves as a viable independent ultra-Radical organisation that could command the loyalty of the reforming MPs.[88] In doing so they reasserted Chartist leadership of Parliamentary Radicalism, and it was for precisely this reason that Henry Vincent was *not* supported in Ipswich a month later despite the identical circumstances in which the by-election was called. Vincent, a signatory of the Charter and member of the NCA Executive, had infuriated Chartists by providing the CSU with a propaganda coup by joining them during their first conference.[89] When he stood for Ipswich in August it consequently merited only a descriptive two sentence notice in the *Northern Star*. His contests in Tavistock in March 1843 and Kilmarnock in 1844 were completely ignored by the Chartist press, a fact overlooked by Chase, who consistently lists him as an NCA candidate after 1841.[90] To endorse Vincent would have been to publicly accept the idea that the barrier between Chartism's and the CSU's programmes and political cultures was permeable.[91] It would also have given credence to the claims made at CSU conferences that Vincent, an extremely popular albeit unsuccessful electoral candidate, demonstrated that their party led electoral and Parliamentary

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86 *Non-Conformist*, 3, 11, 25 May 1842; Henry Hobhouse, *Joseph Sturge: His Life and Work* (London, 1919), 75.
87 *Non-Conformist,* 9 February, 27 April, 3 August 1842; JB Smith Election Letter Books, Cobden to Smith 2 January 1841, Volume V, MCL.
88 Beggs, *History,* iii; *Northern Star*, 28 May, 13, 27 August, 10 September 1842, 10 June 1843; 10 September 1842; *English Chartist Circular*, Volume 2 No 80, and Volume 1, No 68; Duncombe, Speech to the House of Commons, 13 May 1842, vol 63 (1842), cols. 493-497; Gash, *Politics in the age of Peel,* 263.
89 *Northern Star,* 12 March, 2, 9, 23 April, 14 May, 25 June 1842; Gammage, *History*, 205, 408; Labour History Archive and Study Centre, Manchester: LP/VIN1/1/48, Vincent to Minikin, 30 May, 1842.
90 *Ipswich Journal*, 13 August 1842; *Northern Star*, 20 August 1842; *The Times*, 15, 18 August 1842; *Morning Chronicle,* 30 August 1842;*Morning Post*, 17 March 1843, 28 May 1844; *The Fife Herald*, 30 May 1844; Chase, 'Labour's Candidates', 82.
91 William Dorling, *Henry Vincent: A Biographical Sketch* (London, 1879), 35.

Radicalism rather than Chartism.[92] It was not until his contest for Plymouth in July 1846 that Vincent received some critical support from a correspondent to the *Northern Star*, although O'Connor lamented that there was no 'Chartist' candidate for the winnable seat.[93]

The sole purpose of Chartist co-operation with Liberal MPs was the preservation of Chartism's leadership of Parliament's Radicals, and to these ends co-operation could either be deployed or withheld. Because of this Chartists were far more ambivalent about supporting the CSU's candidate Thomas Gisbourne in the 1843 Nottingham by-election, even though he advocated the Charter and was standing once again against a candidate who had utilised corruption.[94] This became more imperative as, following the fallow year of 1843, the CSU sought to develop a more aggressive Parliamentary and electoral organisation. In February 1844, Sharman Crawford, now closely affiliated with the CSU, proposed to cut off the Government's funds unless a petition of grievances was addressed. The Chartist leadership and Duncombe, now practically a Chartist MP, both suspected this was designed to undermine Duncombe's leadership of the Liberal MPs.[95] This was followed by Vincent's contest for Kilmarnock, at which the CSU adopted 'the tactics of the O'Connor faction, by pushing forward a candidate…merely for the purpose of beating the Whigs'.[96] Pursuant to this Sturge stood at Birmingham in July against not just a Tory but a Whig, which allowed the Tory to win, one of the tactics that proved Chartist effectiveness in 1841. Whereas Vincent's contest had been ignored, the Chartists responded to the renewed threat of Sturge by re-asserting their leadership over him, presenting the contest as a 'glorious triumph of Chartism' not just because he advocated the six points but also by splitting the vote of the 'COPPOCKITE'

92 Richard, *Memoirs of Joseph Sturge,* 320; *The Leeds Times,* 8 October, 1842; Morning *Chronicle,* 30 August, 1842; *The Newcastle Courant,* 28 April 1843.
93 *Northern Star*, 18 July 1846; *The Leeds Times*, 11 July 1846; *The Western Flying Post*, 11 July 1846.
94 *Northern Star,* 15 April 1843; *Derby Mercury*, 12 April 1843.
95 *Northern Star*, 3 February 1844; 19 September 1846.
96 *The Examiner*, 1 June 1844.

candidate, a term indicative of how closely associated the moderate 'Whig-Radical' Liberals had become to corruption. As the *Northern Star* pointed out, notably dating their electoral strategy to 1837, this 'policy was just what we have recommended for the last seven years…the policy of testing the electoral strength and principle, and of allowing each party to stand upon its own merits'. This claim was repeated by O'Connor's editorial and a report from Birmingham, with the caveat that Sturge's committee was disunited and a Chartist candidate would have polled twice the votes. This adoption by Chartists of the CSU's candidate was repeated again in 1845, when Edward Miall, the editor of the *Non-Conformist*, stood in Southwark.[97]

The CSU's adoption of Chartism's electoral strategy, which included an aspiration to contest as many constituencies as possible, was an explicit threat to one of Chartism's founding ambitions, control of an ultra-Radical Parliamentary faction.[98] Consequently after the Tory split and formation of the Whig Government in June 1846 O'Connor sought to completely detach Chartism from the CSU by arguing that only Chartists could represent labour in Parliament. This case was first made at the 1846 Nottingham by-election caused by John Cam Hobhouse's nomination to the new Cabinet, when O'Connor made a speech pleading 'the case of labour, which had hitherto been left out of the calculation of statesmen', which was highly regarded by not just Hobhouse but Marx and Engels.[99] This was followed by an essay in the *Northern Star* that detailed the betrayals of Chartism by Parliamentary Liberalism, particularly the CSU's history of attempting to seize the leadership of Radicalism from the Chartists. To combat this at the next General Election Chartists should 'resist the acceptance' of their candidates and put forward 'pure, unsullied Chartist' ones instead. A week later he reiterated this, arguing that the 'task is now set' to return 12 Chartist MPs as long as the

97 Henry Richard, *Memoirs of Joseph Sturge* (London, 1864)*,* 320-22; *Northern Star*, 13, 20 July 1844, 23 August 1845.
98 *The Leeds Times,* 10 August 1844.
99 *Northern Star*, 11, 25 July 1846.

election was fought between 'FREE TRADE, which means CHEAP SPECULATION, and the Charter, which means A FAIR DAY'S WAGES FOR A FAIR DAY'S WORK.' In the same month, the NCA established the NCREC to co-ordinate the registration of electors and the standing of candidates.[100] Although no collectivist, O'Connor's development of the Chartist Land Plan had increasingly drawn him to socialist ideas and language. This discourse allowed him to demarcate Liberals uninterested in social and labour reforms as Chartism's opponents, which essentially limited Chartism's possible collaborators in Parliament to Duncombe. The anticipated General Election was thereby set up as one in which the CSU would be neutralised.[101]

The legacy of Chartism's electoral strategy

In the event the CSU disintegrated by the end of 1846, finding that many middle-class electors were hostile to universal suffrage, especially once the Corn Laws had been abolished without working-class aid.[102] Consequently Chartists sought to group former CSU candidates under their aegis, and a number of these were included in the pro-Charter Liberals endorsed by Chartist localities through the NCREC in July 1847.[103] With nine such Liberals returned, one Chartist MP in O'Connor, and the CSU non-existent, the 1847 General Election was optimistically viewed as one in which Chartists led a 'little band of pioneers' sent to the Commons.[104] There was however a distinct lack of enthusiasm for these candidates amongst elements of the national leadership. Reviewing them before the Election the editor of the *Northern Star*, the socialist George Julian Harney, bloodlessly stated that there 'are others in the field, such as Sturge, Vincent, Epps, &c., with whom we have no

100 *Northern Star,* 19, 26 September 1846.
101 Gregory Claeys, *Citizens and Saints: Politics and Anti-Politics in Early British Socialism* (Cambridge, 1989), 208-326. On O'Connor's appropriation of this language see: Malcolm Chase, "'We wish only to work for ourselves": The Chartist Land Plan' in Malcolm Chase and Ian Dyck (eds.) *Living and Learning: Essays in Honour of J.F.C. Harrison* (Aldershot, 1996), 133-48; Tom Scriven, *Popular Virtue: Continuity and Change in Radical Moral Politics, 1820-1870* (Manchester, 2017), 140-63. Bronstein, 'Thomas Slingsby Duncombe'.
102 Hobhouse, *Joseph Sturge,* 79-80; Henry, *Memoirs*, 320-323.
103 *Northern Star*, 24 July 1847.
104 *Northern Star*, 14 August 1847.

community of personal feeling, but whom, nevertheless, on the ground of public principle, we would support.'[105] At Nottingham O'Connor chose to stand against Gisborne, and criticised him along with Hobhouse for their lack of support for labour reforms proposed in Parliament.[106] In Halifax, relations between Chartists and Liberals were tempestuous despite their respective candidates Ernest Jones and Miall standing on a joint ticket.[107] It is clear that amongst this leadership there was now an expectation that advocacy of the six points needed to be paired with a social and labour programme. The *Northern Star* argued that the Peelites were more interested in reform than the Liberal MPs, and for this reason O'Connor stated regret that he supported Gisbourne in 1843 rather than his Peelite opponent. At a public dinner after the election the NCREC-endorsed Liberal and former CSU member Dr John Epps was barracked by a number of Chartist leaders for arguing that the working class could only obtain their rights from the middle class, with O'Connor concluding that 'Capital could not represent labour: "As well might the lamb with the tiger lay down.'"[108] This, along with O'Connor's victory at Nottingham, was celebrated by British and European socialists as proof of an emerging confrontation between proletarian Chartism and bourgeois Liberalism.[109]

In the event O'Connor proved a poor Parliamentarian while Duncombe and Wakley, the Radical Liberals so close to the movement they could be described as Chartist MPs, both had chronic illnesses. The failed insurrections and then repression of 1848 led to many formerly pro-Chartist Liberals distancing themselves from Chartism, with even Vincent explicitly abandoning the Charter at the 1848 York by-election.[110] It also led to a determination by many Chartists to change direction,

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105 *Northern Star*, 24 July 1847.
106 *Northern Star,* 7 August 1847.
107 Chase, 'Labour's Candidates', 74.
108 *Northern Star*, 30 October 1847.
109 *Northern Star*, 9 October 1847; 'The Chartist Banquet In Connection With The Elections Of 1847' in *Marx Engels Collected Works* (London, 2010), Vol. VI, 361-3.
110 A.R. Schoyen, *The Chartist Challenge: A Portrait of George Julian Harney* (London, 1958), 173; York *Herald*, 22 July 1848.

and over the course of 1849 and 1850 many began collaborating with the National Financial and Parliamentary Reform Association (NFPRA), based around Hume's moderate reform programme, and spurred on by O'Connor's abandonment of the schismatic strategy he had always pursued in favour of what he depicted as an alliance with middle-class Liberals against the aristocracy.[111] This included Thomas Clark and Philip McGrath, who left the NCA Executive to found the National Charter League (NCL) with the intent purpose of such collaboration, and who, as part of the NCREC Executive, had been noticeably sanguine about the prospects of working with Radical Liberal MPs, indicating that some elements within the movement had long been uninterested in the factional nature of Chartism's electoral strategy.[112] Even so, this was not a complete departure from Chartism's previous position. Many Chartists entered this coalition reluctantly, believing that their participation meant that Hume's moderate programme would be replaced with the six points, and abandoned it in disillusionment when they realised the middle-class Liberals opposed 'the realization of the aims of the Charter'.[113]

Nevertheless, by seeking to collaborate with Hume and the 'Whig-Radical' Liberals this was still a serious break from Chartism's earlier attitude towards MPs. However, facing similar weaknesses the socialist Chartists who led the Chartist rump into the 1852 General Election had to make a similar concession. By March 1851 the socialists Harney and Ernest Jones had won the battle for the Executive of the NCA against Chartists who wanted a collaborative relationship with Liberalism. However, they soon led polarised camps, with Harney leaving the NCA and publishing the *Star of Freedom,* while Jones established the *People's Paper.*[114] For both men, the 1852 General Election

111 *Northern Star*, 13, 26 October, 10 November 1849, 6, 13, 20 April, 11 May, 19 October 1850; *Reynolds's Weekly News*, 23 June 1850.
112 *Northern Star*, 8 August, 19 September, 26 September 1846; Chase, 'Labour's Candidates', 75-6.
113 Thomas Frost, *Forty Years' Recollections, Literary and Political* (London, 1880), 203-7; *Reynolds's Weekly News*, 23 June 1850.
114 Chase*, Chartism*, 338-9; Schoyen, *Chartist Challenge*, 196-7.

represented an opportunity of not just reviving Chartism by returning at least one MP, but rowing back on their previous revolutionary enthusiasm and demonstrating social democracy's compatibility with Parliament. Both newspapers opened the contest by building on O'Connor's repudiation of Parliamentary Liberalism in 1846-7 by now arguing that only working-class socialists should stand, yet only four clear-cut Chartist candidates emerged: William Newton in Tower Hamlets, Jones in Halifax, Harney in Bradford, and Samuel Carter in Tavistock.[115] In a tactical retreat, over the following weeks both factions turned to the 1837 strategy and sought out Liberals who accepted the Charter. The most Radical of these was William Coningham in Westminster, who was ejected from the Reform Club for declaring not only for the Charter but also social reforms since 'all wealth is the produce of labour'.[116] In Nottingham Charles Sturgeon stood for five of the six points, while Liberals were also endorsed by the *Star of Freedom* in Southwark and Lambeth, although the *People's Paper* cautioned that unlike Coningham they 'need a little spurring to place them still farther in advance of the Liberal party.'[117] In Finsbury Duncombe angered Chartists by suggesting that a new party should demand 'all the essential principles of the Charter' but not the Charter itself, and some refused to support him even after he backtracked in the face of opposition at a nomination meeting.[118] The 1852 General Election was significant for being the first fought by a party on a social democratic programme, but it is notable that this party had to return to Chartism's inaugural electoral strategy to seek any headway. Even then it is clear that without a strong and united movement behind it, it had lost its coherency.

The failure of most of these candidates was dissected in detail over the following months, with corruption, poor organisation, and the 'class object' of the registration courts seen as undermining

115 *Star of Freedom*, 8, 15 May 1852; *People's Paper*, 8, 15, May 1852; *Reynolds's Newspaper*, 16, 23 May, 6 June 1852.
116 *People's Paper,* 26 June, 10 July 1852; *The Leader*, 10 July 1852; *Reynolds's Newspaper*, 27 June, 4 July 1852.
117 *People's Paper*, 10 July 1852; *Star of Freedom,* 26 June 1852; *Reynolds's Newspaper*, 13 June 1852.
118 *People's Paper*, 8, 29 May, 26 June, 3 July 1852; *Star of Freedom*, 29 May 1852.

Chartist candidates.[119] This clearly conforms to Chase's conclusion that the organisational weakness and the anti-democratic nature of Parliament hamstrung all Chartist electioneering. Nevertheless, it should be noted that returning Chartist candidates was not the strategy's sole object, since one of its key and original objectives was to pressure the distrusted Parliamentary Radicals into accepting the six points.[120] The fruit of this was not only a group of Liberals, most consistently Duncombe, who advocated the Charter, but also Chartism's ability to contest the leadership of Parliamentary Radicalism with their better funded rivals, the ACLL and CSU. Because of this it is difficult to conclude that its legacy was an 'accommodation with Liberalism' lubricated by a shared Radical heritage and the co-operation with MPs evident in the 1840s, simply because an accommodation with Liberalism by definition was a departure from Chartism's independent and antagonistic electoral strategy.[121] Chartists approached this co-operation as a means of radicalising Liberals, rather than treating them as trusted equals, and those not receptive to this radicalisation were opposed outright. Chartist electioneering did, certainly, create a culture of civic participation later harnessed by the Liberal Party, yet in terms of strategy and purpose this electioneering was discontinuous.[122]

In 1858 Chartist 'Old Guards' furiously attacked Jones when he suggested at Chartism's final conference an alliance with Liberals behind a programme of household suffrage, and he fared poorly in 1859 when he stood in Nottingham on such a 'registered' suffrage accompanied by the ballot.[123] From this point onwards this vestigial Chartism began to dissipate as new alliances were forged between working-class reformers and Liberals, eased by a shared internationalism and growing rejection amongst many Liberals of earlier utilitarian and free market orthodoxies. The Reform

119 *People's Paper*, 3 July, 7 August, 9, 18 October 1852; *Star of Freedom,* 22 May, 5, 12 June 1852; *Reynolds's Newspaper*, 20, 27 June, 11 July 1852.
120 Chase, 'Labour's Candidates', 79.
121 Chase, 'Labour's Candidates', 80-1.
122 Malcolm Chase, *The Chartists: Perspectives & Legacies* (London, 2015), 1-13.
123 *Reynolds's Newspaper*, 14 February 1858; *Daily News*, 24 March 1857, 13 April 1859.

League, founded in 1863, represented the distillation of late Chartism's social democracy into a more moderate social interventionism that pursued manhood suffrage but was willing to concede household suffrage. While the extent to which this was a turbulent transition is debated, it is clear that the electoral cultures of Chartism and this popular Liberalism did not transpose neatly.[124] The League's alliance with Liberalism not only entailed rejection of the schismatic strategy that Chartists pursued at the polls between 1837 and 1852, but involved financial arrangements unthinkable to Chartists. Prior to the 1868 General Election the secretary of the Reform League, George Howell, arranged with the Liberal whip, G.G. Glyn, a secret 'Special Fund' for League electioneering work in seventy constituencies on the understanding that labour candidates would not stand against Liberal ones. The fund was to be provided by Samuel Morley, a woollen manufacturer and occasional Liberal MP.[125] Jones stood for Manchester as an advocate of manhood suffrage, a volte-face on his position only three years earlier which became illustrative of some of the difficulties ex-Chartists had in presenting themselves as Liberals after he came under attack from a more moderate Liberal faction.[126] However, he was not the only ex-Chartist who stood, many of whom received no League support because they threatened Liberal candidates. In Stoke-on-Trent Robert Hartwell, a former LWMA member active in the 1837 General Election, struggled to pay his expenses and was bought off by the Liberal Party to safeguard their candidates, while in Tower Hamlets William Newton stood again, unapologetic about splitting the Liberal vote. This obstinacy was redolent of the Chartist desire for electoral independence, even while their programme was moderated.[127]

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124 Margot Finn, *After Chartism: Class and Nation in English Radical Politics, 1848-1878* (Cambridge, 1993), 188-225; Biagini, *Liberty, Retrenchment, and Reform*, pp. 257-312; Antony Taylor, '"The Best Way to Get What He Wanted": Ernest Jones and the Boundaries of Liberalism in the Manchester Election of 1868', *Parliamentary History* 16:2 (1997), 185-204; Robert Hall, 'Chartism Remembered: William Aitken, Liberalism, and the Politics of Memory', *Journal of British Studies* 38:4 (October, 1999), 445-470; Peter Gurney, 'Working-Class Writers and the Art of Escapology in Victorian England: the Case of Thomas Frost' *Journal of British Studies* 45:1 (January, 2006), 51-71.
125 Harrison, *Before the Socialists*, 137-209; BL Add Ms 44348 f. 157.
126 Taylor, '"The Best Way to Get What he Wanted"'.
127 *Reynold's Newspaper,* 2 January 1870; Owen, *Labour and the Caucus,* 36.

This point signals a very fundamental difference between popular Liberal electoral politics and that of Chartism. The 'Special Fund' caused recriminations both within the Reform League and publicly.[128] For Marx and Engels the deal marked the extent to which British labour leaders had sold themselves out to Liberalism and abandoned the potential of an independent proletarian party of which Chartism was the model, which as we have seen was an accurate interpretation of the movement's manifestation as an electoral and Parliamentary party.[129] As James Owen points out for most of these leaders the Liberal Party had always been the best vehicle towards Parliament, besides which the Reform League possessed a poor electoral capacity before the agreement.[130] It is nevertheless true that this episode reveals the League to be fundamentally distinct from Chartism. The Reform League's position was not only a rejection of Chartism's commitment to independence at elections and within Parliament, but also an inversion of the Chartist strategy of strong-arming Liberals to accept their full programme and leadership through both electoral and extra-Parliamentary mobilisation. Thus while George Odger stated he supported advanced Liberals over 'milk-and-water' ones when he stood in Chelsea, he still insisted he had 'no desire to divide the Liberal interest', the position at the heart of Chartism's earlier strategy.[131] Integral to this was a rejection of Chartist moral politics. Much of Chartism's critique of Liberalism's Parliamentary and electoral politics centred on the use of extra-political power for political ends, of which a millionaire providing funds to the Reform League on the condition that they did not split the Liberal vote is a clear example. For *Reynolds's Newspaper*, which retained Chartism's moralism, the Liberal Party was a practitioner of corruption and pragmatism while every time 'a working man has presented himself to a working-class constituency, he has been met with the rattle of Whig money-bags in his face'.[132] In

128 *Reynolds's Newspaper*, 1 November 1868; Harrison, *Before the Socialists*, 190.
129 Frederick Engels, 'The English Elections' in *Karl Marx and Frederick Engels on Britain* (London, 1953), 464-70.
130 Owen*, Labour and the Caucus*, p. 35.
131 *Reynolds's Newspaper*, 4 October 1868.
132 *Reynolds's Newspaper,* 1 November 1868. See also: 25 June 1865, 1 April 1866, 2 January 1870, 15 October 1871, 4 August 1872.

this, the Chartist critique of Liberalism and electoral pragmatism remained alive, even if its foundational electoral strategy did not.

Conclusion

Looking in detail at Chartism's electoral strategy and culture offers an important interpretation of the nature of the movement. It strongly supports the 'political' understanding of Chartism, which rejects the thesis that it was a reaction to social immiseration and periods of economic crisis and instead emphasises its political objectives and sophistication.[133] Indeed, it is clear that the movement developed from coherent attempts to not simply support Radical MPs, but to attempt to radicalise them and thereby directly form a Parliamentary party, an indication that Chartism needs to be placed much more firmly within Parliamentary historiography. The collapse of Chartism, and with it the removal of the pressure upon Radical MPs to pursue a coherent and extensive reform programme, deserves further study as a potential cause for the dislocation and decline of Parliamentary Radicalism that has been outlined by Miles Taylor.[134] Furthermore, Chartism's electoral and Parliamentary strategy indicates that the movement does not possess an unproblematic location within the tradition of constitutionalism. The central discourse of 'purity of election' emphasised how extra-political power was used to corrupt and control electors and non-electors, forming a maintenance of class power solidified by dual political and economic control. This was not, however, a redevelopment of the 'Old Corruption' tradition, in which a conspiracy of financiers and aristocrats were subverting the previously well-balanced constitution.[135] It was instead a critique that drew heavily from the democratic language and tradition that Peter Gurney has outlined as central to

133 Miles Taylor, 'Rethinking the Chartists: Searching for Synthesis in the Historiography of Chartism'*, The Historical Journal* 39:2 (1996), pp. 479-95.
134 Miles Taylor, *The Decline of British Radicalism, 1847-1860* (Oxford, 1995).
135 As Matthew Roberts suggests, by 1841 'Old Corruption' had declined as a central aspect of Chartism's political and economic thought: '"The Feast of the Gridiron is at hand": Chartism, Cobbett and Currency', in James Grande and John Stevenson (eds.), *William Cobbett, Romanticism and the Enlightenment: Contexts and Legacies* (London, 2015), pp. 107-121.

Chartism, and that focussed on the control industrialists and merchants could exercise in the post-1832 borough constituencies in which Chartism and the Liberal Whig-Radical coalition faced one another.[136] In this and in its explicitly schismatic, antagonistic, and uncompromising electoral strategy Chartism was markedly different from both Whiggish and constitutionalist Radical contemporaries, and the conciliatory and pragmatic positions of the Reform League a decade after the movement's demise.

[136] Peter J. Gurney, 'The Democratic Idiom: Languages of Democracy in the Chartist Movement' *The Journal of Modern History* 86:3 (2014), pp. 566-602.