

## 6HUM1012 Popular Protest

### Week 7: Chartism

Chartism is normally examined in terms of its political significance. Students (and often examiners) get fixated with these features of its political programme:

#### 1. The Six Points (see British Library page in the handout)

A response to the limitations of the 1832 Reform Act.

But - There was nothing essentially new about the Charter except its title – the 6 points were elaborated in John Cartwright's *Take Your Choice!* (1776)

#### 2. The three national petitions of 1839, 1842 and 1848

#### 3. 'moral' versus 'physical' force Chartism

#### 4. Was Chartism a 'knife or fork question'?

Joseph Rayner Stephens, 24 September 1838:

'This question of Universal Suffrage was a knife and fork question... and if any man asked him what he meant by Universal Suffrage, he would answer, that every working man in the land had a right to have a good coat to his back, a comfortable abode in which to shelter himself and his family, a good dinner upon his table, and no more work than was necessary for keeping him in health, and as much wages for that work as would keep him in plenty, and afford him the enjoyment of all the blessings of life which a reasonable man could desire. (Tremendous cheers).'

Chartism was a profoundly politicised response to recent political history, but it did not develop in an economic vacuum.

Economic depressions 1839-40, 1842, 1847-8.

In the later 19thC it became commonplace for those who had been Chartists or who sympathised with them to explain the movement or excuse its militancy exclusively as the politics of hunger.

Malcolm Chase, *Chartism: a New History*, p. 10: 'Hunger however does not readily translate into a sustained political movement, supported by a dedicated press and its own professional agents and lecturers, and for the most part distinguished by self-restraint and discipline. Yet this is exactly what Chartism was.'

## **5. More recently, the 'language of class'.**

Gareth Stedman Jones, 'Rethinking Chartism', in his *Languages of Class* (1982)

As a secular phenomenon, Chartism was the last, most prominent and most desperate – though not perhaps the most revolutionary – version of a radical critique of society, which had enjoyed an almost continuous existence since the 1760s and 1770s. The vision which lay behind this critique was of a more or less egalitarian society, populated exclusively by the industrious, and needing minimal government. Political power, as Chartists conceived it, in line with eighteenth century radicals, was essentially a negative phenomenon, the freedom from present oppressions and the legal or legislative prevention of their recurrence.

**This workshop focuses rather on Chartism as a social movement.**

What were its tactics? What were its different forms of action?

How do they fit into Charles Tilly's trajectory of the development of social movements in this period?

**The Chartist Land Plan**

In March 1846, O'Connor bought 103 acres of neglected farm land at Heronsgate near Rickmansworth in Hertfordshire for £1,860 and renamed it O'Connorville. The land was divided it into thirty-five allotments of between two and four acres each. O'Connor planned the estate and each house cost just over £100 to build.

What does the advert for O'Connorville, Hertfordshire, portray about the ideals and goals of a section of the Chartist movement?

### **Domestic and everyday Chartism**

- becoming a popular topic of interest for historians.
- What does Ann Dawson's embroidery sampler tell us about Chartism?