The early Victorian period in Britain saw the beginnings of government intervention in the field of educational provision, beginnings surrounded by much discussion of the nature and purposes of education. The first government grant-in-aid of elementary education in Britain, made in 1833, came before the emergence of the Chartist movement. But the next four stages in the development of a national educational system all fell within the period of Chartist activity. In 1839 a proposed increase in the grant to the two great voluntary societies from £20,000 to £30,000 led to the creation of the Privy Council Committee on Education. This, in turn, resulted in the first inspectors being appointed, the whole system being largely controlled by the committee's secretary, James Phillips Kay-Shuttleworth. In 1843 Peel's Conservative ministry put forward a wide-ranging reform in popular education as part of its Factory Bill, but the so-called educational clauses had to be dropped because of opposition from Protestant dissenters to the proposed arrangements for religious education. This religious issue was to bedevil education for years to come, the height of controversy coming in 1847, a year which also saw much debate over the related issue of the famous Minutes of 1846. Written by Kay-Shuttleworth, these provided for the regulation of teacher training and grants-in-aid for teachers' salaries. Finally, in 1850, W. J. Fox, a radical M.P., produced a bill to create a system of national education which was noticed with general favour by the Chartist press. It was the middle-class reformers, pre-eminently Kay-Shuttleworth himself, who had been the greatest influence in persuading both Whig and Conservative ministries to become involved in education. There was a broad agreement among such men on the power of education to reduce crime and produce a more moral, ordered, stable and harmonious society, in particular a working class inculcated with the virtues of 'sobriety, cleanliness, forethought and method'.

The purpose of this article is to examine the popular radical response to this theory and activity as it is expressed in the educational ideas of the Chartist. Evidence for Chartist opinion must necessarily be drawn from the literate and articulate élite who wrote for and published Chartist journals and pamphlets. How far this élite represented the views of the ordinary committed Chartists, even more the fluctuating mass of Chartist
sympathizers, is a matter of impression and guesswork, at least for the time being. Our quite profound ignorance as to the real nature of the support for the Chartist movement does not help in supplying an answer. But if we assume its social heart lay at the boundaries of what R. S. Neale has called 'Working Class A' and 'the Middling Class', then the elite seems likely to have been more representative of that heart than of the nebulous mass of supporters and sympathizers who so quickly and easily fell away from the movement. The problem is one which encompasses the very nature of nineteenth-century radical movements and to deal with it adequately would require a very much larger work.

However, a preliminary study such as this may at least raise a number of significant questions about Chartism even if it would be inappropriate to do more than give outlines of the answers to them. In particular, two problems need to be borne in mind. The first concerns the relationship of Chartist ideas to others current in early Victorian Britain. Chartist attitudes to education may indicate the limits which existed to the differences between popular radicalism and the ideas of the middle-class reformers, and so reinforce those attempts which have been made to move Chartist historiography away from its inbuilt assumptions concerning the place of the movement in the development of the working class-labour-socialist tradition. The other aspect of the orthodox view of Chartism which may be challenged is that which stresses the local and personal divisions within the movement and underestimates the degree of ideological consensus that existed. That is not to say that differences did not exist, but that those differences did not fall into clear and consistent patterns. Rather than differences it might be better to talk of inconsistencies, as much within individual Chartists as between groups of them. Here again attitudes to education may be used as a tentative indicator of the kinds of features which characterized Chartist ideology as a whole.

It is particularly important to make this point since the divisions within Chartism seem, at least on superficial analysis, to bear some relationship with educational ideas. The most well-known Chartist discussion of education is *Chartism: A New Organization of the People*, which appeared in 1840 as a joint venture by William Lovett and John Collins, though it was almost certainly Lovett’s work alone. Written while the two men were in Warwick gaol, the work proposed a whole scheme of education. But it also proposed a related scheme of Chartist organization. Lovett’s plan — which came to be known as ‘Knowledge Chartism’ — was roundly condemned by the most popular leader of the Chartists, Feargus O’Connor, and his followers. This was certainly not a new split, but the controversy widened the already existing division between, on the one hand, Lovett and a group of predominantly (though by no means entirely) London-based men who looked to moral suasion and the possibility of a middle-class alliance to carry the Charter and, on the other, O’Connor and his largely younger followers, less patient and normally more socially exclusive in their attitudes. Yet it may be argued that the
two groups had a greater area of agreement on education than disagreement and that the basic causes of the split have little to do with ‘Knowledge Chartism’. In any case, too much emphasis has probably been placed on this simple division between O’Connorites and Lovettites.7

The personal element in this split has been examined, though there is no full-scale biography of William Lovett, a man who was not merely the most thoughtful of the Chartist leaders but also a paradigm of the self-improving artisan.8 The individual biography has in fact been one of the two forms which Chartist history has most frequently taken. Thus we have more or less useful studies of O’Connor, Bronterre O’Brien, John Frost, Ernest Jones, G. J. Harney, W. J. Linton and Robert Lowery.9 But even more representative of the mainstream of Chartist historiography is the mass of local studies. Apart from the need for a major work on London Chartistism, which in a peculiar circular argument typical of Chartist historiography has been undervalued because of being understudied,10 it is difficult to believe that yet more local studies will add significantly to our understanding of the movement. Moreover, the possibility of additional biographies is limited by the scarcity of sources.

The study of Chartism has thus concentrated on the leading personalities and upon organization at the national and, even more, the local level. This in its turn has resulted in a second variety of circular argument. Chartism is seen as an amalgam of local movements and grievances which was always placed under centrifugal strain by the force of local differences and personal conflicts.11 No one would deny the very considerable accuracy of this view; yet it is possible to argue that it has become so deeply entrenched that there is a danger of Chartist historians becoming moles burrowing into ever smaller local holes. One of the greatest weaknesses in the study of Chartism is the relative lack of analysis of Chartist attitudes to various problems. For example, given the long-recognized importance of the anti-Poor Law movement to the origins of Chartism, it is surprising that little has been done on the development of Chartist attitudes to the New Poor Law.12 Equally valuable would be studies of Chartist attitudes to emigration, colonial problems (especially those of Canada), the workings of American democracy, public health, class ideology, mechanization, the role of women, and, of course, education. These problems are not entirely ignored in existing works but it is indicative of the present state of affairs that the most serious study of the Chartists and education is by a historian of education, not a historian of Chartism.13

One of the major difficulties in the analysis of Chartist attitudes to social and political questions, especially those questions which a government (including a hypothetical Chartist government) might have to solve, is the frequent Chartist retreat into a vague utopianism. Chartist writers and speakers were notoriously loath to be too specific concerning the actions of a Chartist government. Parallel to this unwillingness was the common assertion that no significant reforms could occur in social and economic relationships until political power had been won by the masses.
Both positions grew increasingly untenable as time passed. Chartists, however, long maintained their initial optimism concerning imminent victory. As late as 1850 the National Reform League for the Peaceful Regeneration of Society could airily argue, ‘doubtless, we want a sound system of national education for youth, made compulsory upon all parents and guardians. . . . But these and all other needful reforms will be easy of accomplishment when those comprised in the foregoing propositions [i.e. the Six Points of the Charter] shall have been effected’.14 Indeed, one of the major objections to William Lovett’s educational plans put forward in 1840 was that they confused the issue of the necessity of universal suffrage preceding major educational reform.15 It was a Chartist commonplace that such reform would follow the Charter. As an editorial in the Northern Star put it in August 1840, ‘no systematic plan of education can precede Universal Suffrage’.16 The argument was often taken a stage further: the Six Points were only means to the ends of social reforms, ‘Instruments merely, valuable or worthless according to the use made of them’.17

There was, in particular, a realization that education was one of the social reforms that must follow the Charter; in part, because of the extreme sensitivity to the charge made by the opponents of Chartism that the masses were not worthy of the franchise since they were ignorant and uneducated. This was the real ideological basis of the opposition to the stress laid on the necessity of education by Lovett and may explain why he was hissed at in an important meeting in 1838 when he stated that he ‘would like to see the people educated’.18 It could be seen as offering aid and comfort to the enemy. Yet it does not mean that other Chartists did not consider education important: Lovett’s most bitter opponents in the early Chartist years, Harney and the group that emerged from the East London Democratic Association, also made a point of arguing for the creation of a reformed educational system by a post-Charter government.19 There was, it seems, a consensus on this issue, which was best expressed in 1851: ‘When we have the power to make laws we will not preach about the benefits, but remove the obstacles to education’.20 If it was generally agreed that a fully satisfactory reform of the entire educational system would have to await the Charter, it was equally agreed that by local and voluntary effort much could be done to hasten the glorious day. Chartist classes for children and adults were run in a number of areas — for example, in April 1838 104 mainly young men and women were reported to be attending classes on three evenings a week in Elland.21 In Leicester the Shakespearean Association set up an adult Sunday school.22 The exact distribution of such schools, the nature of their pupils, their durability and success is open to question and needs detailed investigation, but it would not be difficult to make up a fairly lengthy list of localities where some Chartist educational enterprise was embarked upon.23 In this the Chartists were doing no more than following well-established radical precedents.24 The London Working Men’s Association in its address of
June 1836 linked a ‘cheap and honest’ press with education of the young, publication of pamphlets, and the creation of a library: this in effect spelt out the precedents a variety of Chartist groups tried to follow. It is an easy matter, then, to establish that the Chartists were interested in education and educational reform. But what has been said so far gives little impression of what kind of education the Chartists favoured, how it was to be organized, what its function was; or what the Chartist critique of existing education and educational attitudes consisted of. The Chartists perhaps spoke most clearly when attacking what they saw as the failings of existing attitudes toward, and provision for, education. Criticism of the extent of the existing facilities for the education of the people took two main lines. One was a rather tedious repetition of that standby of school textbooks in later years: the fact that the increased grant of 1893 (£30,000) was less than half the amount spent on the royal stables. An ironic editorial in the *Charter* referred to the surprise felt by the writer in discovering the paltriness of the government grant—he had assumed from the opposition shown by the Church of England that the proposed scheme must be a good one. ‘Paltriness’ was a word which flowed easily from the pens of Chartist writers after 1839 in describing government grants-in-aid of education. Less frequently such writers were able to engage in a more sustained and detailed consideration of the problem. This was particularly evident in an article in the *Charist Circular* in 1839. The article compared the returns made in 1818 and the survey of the Scottish Highlands made in 1824 with the situation in Holland, Prussia, and Bavaria. Not surprisingly, Britain did not emerge well from the comparison. The *Charter* had already analyzed the statistical surveys carried out in the 1830s to make a similar point. The *Northern Star* also made effective use of the statistical surveys, as well as government enquiries, in an article by ‘Young England’ in 1844. The same article was scathing about the standard of many of the teachers: ‘In many instances the teachers only become so after having failed at everything else, or are originally led to adopt the profession either because they are dunces, incapable of otherwise earning a subsistence, or cripples, unfit for active work at a trade.’ The most significant point about these criticisms, and others in a similar vein, is that they do not serve to distinguish the Chartists from middle-class reformers such as Kay-Shuttleworth. The most complete and reliable evidence of the failings of existing provisions for education was taken from the work of such men and of organizations like the Central Society of Education and the London and Manchester Statistical Societies formed by them.

One of the totemic beliefs of these middle-class theorists of education was the idea that ignorance was a major cause of crime and that education would therefore reduce crime. Chartists found themselves in some difficulty in discussing this argument. Apart from anything else, it raised once again the bogey of the ignorance-means-unfit-for-the-franchise charge. Thus the *Northern Star* in 1848 produced a satirical editorial on
'Frightful Ignorance' in which it asked, 'are there no philanthropists who will start a society for the better instruction of the rich? Such an association is surely wanted. The ignorance of the College-taught classes is perfectly frightful.' On a number of occasions Chartists simply denied the existence of a connection between crime and ignorance, normally by arguing that crime and vice resulted from poverty which was itself the author of ignorance. Yet, just as often, the connection was admitted, even if the Chartists endeavoured to maintain some ideological distance between themselves and their middle-class opponents. Thus the producers of the *Northern Star* in 1839, seeing Lord Brougham as the leading political figure to espouse the crime-derives-from-ignorance theory, were delighted to print an article which argued that 'on this subject of education, Lord Brougham has been in the habit, during the whole of his public life, of uttering an immense amount of nonsense and cant... between vice and ignorance of moral and religious truth, there exists an inseparable alliance; but we do, most emphatically, deny, that there exists any necessary connection between vice, and ignorance of the things which Lord Brougham styles “knowledge”.' But the article was only a reprint from the *Morning Herald*, and was in any case rather strained in its attempt to separate itself from the orthodox view. A fairer representation of the opinions of the middle-class theorists that Brougham supported would be that vice and crime resulted from ‘ignorance of moral truth’, while extreme political radicalism (such as Chartism) was the outcome of ‘ignorance of the things which Lord Brougham styles “knowledge”’. The consensus on the former point is at least as significant as the obvious divergence on the latter.

A more fruitful and original line of Chartist thought was that which stressed the inter-relatedness of various social changes, including education. The theory underlying this position was summed up in a *Northern Star* editorial which stated that the ‘virtues of a people are characteristics, their vices are consequences of oppression and misrule’. It was in essence an extension of the view already cited which saw poverty as the common source of crime and ignorance. For a complete reform it was necessary to attack all problems simultaneously: ‘Ameliorate the condition of the oppressed. Give them their rights; let a good day’s labour earn its merited reward, increase the comforts of the poor, and then leave education in charge of those, for whose benefit it is intended.’ Implied in this argument was a criticism of other groups who saw the possibility of treating education largely in isolation. Once such implications were spelt out they were likely to reveal a somewhat paranoid vision of a conglomerate evil figure — perhaps we could call him Henry Maltham, millowner — who was the source of opposition to Chartist ideas. Thus a writer in the *Red Republican* could bracket ‘the Whig Quacks, and rosewater political sentimentalists of the Boz school’ in the same category. Equally, the *Northern Star* could refer to ‘Brougham, Chadwick, and the rest of the Malthusian gang’.
The most bitter Chartist criticism of Maltham’s ideology, which was seen to be in control of existing education, was that it saw education as a means of controlling and repressing the working classes. A wide variety of Chartists seem to have been in agreement with a lecturer in Sheffield who criticized the day, charity, and Sunday Schools as places ‘where orthodox [sic] and loyalty are crammed into the brains and lashed into the breeches of the rising generation’. This criticism was more well-founded than some the Chartists put forward; it is difficult to argue that men like Joseph Fletcher, or Frederic Hill, or Kay-Shuttleworth would fundamentally disagree with the statement that ‘if we received a good education in the true Manchester principles, we would come to the belief that we have no reason to grumble about our lot’. Perhaps even worse than the indoctrination of political subservience was the contraction of mental horizons, the acceptance of selfishness as the moral basis of society. This was as much true of education for the wealthy as it was of education for the poor.

Naturally, when Chartists turned from criticism to more positive programmes of their own, they often stressed exactly the opposite as the function of education. But in doing so they did not succeed in differentiating themselves from other schools of thought. This can be seen most obviously in the frequent insistence that ‘education’ should not be confused with ‘mere instruction’. As W. J. Linton put it, education ‘is the culture of the whole nature, the development of its full powers of growth’. The notion that education was not mere rote learning of facts but a parallel development of the whole person was one present in all the major Chartist writings on the nature and function of education. But then it was present in nearly all the major early Victorian writings on the nature and function of education, Chartist, non-Chartist, and anti-Chartist. This large common ground between Chartists and their opponents was particularly noticeable when the subject of moral education was under discussion. Those Chartists who, in the early 1840s, associated popular radicalism with temperance were obviously most prone to sound at times like a ‘Malthusian economist’ in full swing. For example, the formidably named East London Female Total Abstinence Charter Association stated, ‘that portion of hard-earned wages which is now squandered away at the pot-house and gin-palace would enable us to secure a sound and proper education for our children, in accordance with our views and feelings’. Even without the Chartist sting in the tail this statement was one which could have been made by a wide variety of members of the movement. The leaders of the Durham Chartists in 1840, Ernest Jones, a journeyman hatter, T. B. Smith of Leeds (who rather luridly stressed the unequal attractions of ‘a buxom landlady’ and a ‘wife borne down with care’), all made the same point that not only would more education produce more temperance but more temperance would produce more education. But temperance was only an aspect of general moral self-cultivation and self-improvement. If Chartism were to ‘represent the best intelligence, and the
best morals of the people', it is not surprising to find one Chartist arguing that the first purpose of educating one’s children was ‘to have them as intelligent, as virtuous, as highly cultivated, and as extensively useful as possible’.49 T. B. Smith wanted to produce people who were ‘industrious, frugal, cleanly and respectable’, which made him sound like an extension speaker for the Kay-Shuttleworth machine.50 The Chartists and the middle-class reformers saw education in very similar moral terms.

The Chartists, however, might be expected to be prepared to lay greater stress on the possible role of education in accelerating the rate of social mobility. True, children of talent were to be given the advantages usually denied them. The schools were to provide useful citizens. Popular education would give each child ‘the means of learning a good business, by following which he could be a useful and independent member of the community’.51 The most complete Chartist discussions of the forms of education usually emphasized the acquisition of vocational skills.52 It could be claimed that already popular education was more useful than that of the aristocracy with its emphasis on social airs and graces plus a smattering of Greek and Latin and ‘obsolete metaphysics’.53 Even so, it is not common to find the blunt statement that ‘all have an equal right to room and opportunity for the growth and development of their own unequal faculties’.54 An editorial in the Northern Star laid greater emphasis on equality of opportunity for rewards to encourage the attainment of educational qualifications than on equality of opportunity for education leading to rewards.55 The same editorial laid so much stress on the power and value of individual competition that it acts as a useful warning against exaggerating any supposed radical tradition of mutuality. Most Chartists were not particularly coherent on this whole question of the relationship of education to what today would be called ‘life-chances’. This again was typical of a wide variety of early Victorian writings.

The point at which the Chartists most completely departed from their contemporaries in terms of the function of education was, naturally enough, at the point where education became a means of transmitting ideology. Even here there was a reasonably common perception of the form of the problem. The political catechism printed in the Chartist Circular, for example, stated that education would give ‘to the parties instructed a knowledge of their duties — personal, relative, and national’. This formulation of the problem was very similar to the argument of a man like G. R. Porter, of the Board of Trade, the Central Society of Education, and the London Statistical Society, that education should be used to instruct the working classes in ‘a right understanding of all their relative and social duties’.56 But Chartists were likely to mention rights as well as duties, whereas the middle-class theorists stressed only the latter.57 Both sides agreed that education should be used to make the working classes ‘fully to perceive [their] real position in society’;58 the disagreement was over the nature of that real position. The teaching of universal political rights in democratic schools ‘would recruit phalanxes
for the future'.

For Chartists who were suspicious of physical force those phalanxes would be the vanguard of a true revolution, permanent and universally beneficial because carried through by a new breed of man. More widespread was the belief that education was the means of creating a mass movement by Chartist principles. It was at this point that the Chartist leaders revealed their awareness of their own numerical weaknesses and their suspicions of the reliability of the mass of the working classes. As G. J. Harney wrote in 1850, ‘We desire to see the great mass of the working classes indoctrinated with Chartist principles, and inspired with that holy fervour which at present guides the few rather than the many.’ Similarly, Thomas Cooper feared that any future Chartist gains might be lost by ‘the unintellectual Many’, while an anonymous writer in the Northern Star, ironically in words which echoed those of the middle-class theorists, argued that ‘the ignorance of the masses has made them in all ages the slaves of the enlightened and cunning’.

In extreme form, such attitudes could lead to chillingly modern denunciations of class traitors: ‘Every Proletarian who does not see and feel that he belongs to an enslaved and degraded class, is a fool; if he see, but dare not resent, he is a contemptible coward.’ Such bitterness was perhaps more likely to be found at the very end of the Chartist movement, though it would be unwise to ignore the attitudes and emotions revealed by such a statement. More typical of the Chartist consensus was the Manchester Chartist Council’s hope of creating ‘a happy and healthy state of society, by extending a thorough knowledge of our moral obligations, social duties and political rights.’

But the question of who was to be entrusted with the task of ‘extending a thorough knowledge’ and how it was to be done was one which often created considerable difficulties for Chartist writers on education. The Chartists inherited a long radical tradition of suspicion of powerful governments which could not help but be a factor in their approach to the solution of social problems. They could still talk of ‘the establishment and maintenance of good and cheap government’ as a unifying bond among all radicals and condemn ‘that system of centralization, which aims at the abolition of local authority’.

Thus the Charter reacted with something like a conditioned reflex when it condemned the government’s scheme of 1839, almost before it was introduced, as a ‘continental plan of centralization’.

The reflex could take a long time to retrain since as late as 1847 Ernest Jones’s address to the electors of Halifax could vaguely and weakly call for ‘a Voluntary System of Education, enabling every section of the community to give their children religious and secular instruction in accordance with their own conviction, without any Government interference or control.’ Equally, the East London female Chartists called upon their colleagues to reject ‘Church and State offers of education for our children, which is only calculated to debase the mind, and render it subservient to class interest’. Though suspicion of the government was not often taken quite that far, it was nearly always present when the
Chartists considered the organization of education. W. J. Linton was being highly idiosyncratic when he argued that the child belonged to the State rather than to its parents and that only government could be entrusted with, and efficiently manage, the education of the nation's children.\(^\text{69}\)

A much more common solution to the dilemma the Chartists found themselves in was that which was most fully worked out by William Lovett and described in a number of his works, beginning with the 1837 address of the London Working Men's Association on education and repeated in *Chartism: A New Organization of the People* and in the aims of the National Association for Promoting Political and Social Improvement. Lovett stated the conventional Chartist position that the acquisition of education was the right of the people, its provision the duty of the government. But the suspicion of dictatorial central government led Lovett to limit its powers and functions. Out of its ordinary revenue the government was to erect schools and also provide for their regular inspection 'so far as to see the original intention of the people carried into effect'. But at that point local authorities were to take over. In other words, 'While we want a uniform and just system of education, we must guard against the influence of irresponsible power and public corruption . . . [which] destroys those local energies, experiments and improvements so desirable to be fostered for the advancement of knowledge'. Each locality was to elect, on the basis of universal suffrage, a school committee of twenty or more people. The committee was to appoint the teachers, choose the books and methods of instruction, and was to superintend and manage the schools in each locality. Of course, the system implied the possibility of parochial prejudices and interests coming to the fore. Lovett attempted to forestall this possibility by making the electoral district for each committee larger than the area it superintended, an idea which, it must be confessed, was one of Lovett's most impractical and unworkable. His central body was to be a Committee of Public Instruction, an unfortunately Gallic title, consisting of twelve men selected by Parliament every three years. This committee oversaw the disbursement of government funds, but the local committee were to raise their own rates for the recurrent expenses of the schools.\(^\text{70}\)

Variations were played on Lovett's theme by a number of Chartist writers, or, more precisely, its broad outlines were repeated. Yet it was scarcely a plan that belonged to the Chartists alone. A very similar plan, somewhat less democratic in tone, had been laid before the 1835 Select Committee on Education in Ireland by James Simpson, an Edinburgh lawyer whose political and social affinities were clearly with men like Kay-Shuttleworth.\(^\text{71}\) Moreover, the Chartists themselves, without going as far as Linton did in 1850, were prepared to emphasize the role of central government alone when it became a matter of government education or no education. 'Young England', writing in the *Northern Star* in 1844, felt able to congratulate the governments of both Melbourne and Peel,
for their efforts 'to provide, in some small degree a remedy' for Britain's educational deficiencies. The writer believed that the argument that radicals should be afraid of Continental-style centralization was fallacious: 'In Austria, the Government makes the people: with us, the people make the Government.' The same point, in almost identical terms, was made by a Northern Star editorial in 1847. It was not only out of tune with prevalent Chartist attitudes but totally inconsistent with almost everything else the Chartists said about the political system. Such extraordinary statements could only be understood in terms of their contexts: in 1847 the editorial was opposing what it thought to be the Privy Council Committee's attempts to act without parliamentary control, in 1844 'Young England' was condemning the actions of organized religious groups in watering down the government's scheme of 1839 and destroying that of 1843.

Given the actions of such groups, the Chartists, if for no other reason, had to indicate their own approach to the problem of religious teaching in schools. This was the rock on which broke government proposal after government proposal. By and large the Chartists were of one mind concerning the proper course. As a Northern Star editorial put it in 1850, 'National ignorance is the price we pay for our national religion'. At least as culpable were the dissenters from the national church, since a few months earlier the paper had lamented the effects of 'unseemly and most unchristian warfare for the upperhand' on popular education. In 1843 the paper had been prepared to see the proposed educational clauses of Graham's Factory Bill go through in their entirety rather than lose the opportunity of education for 'those who would not otherwise receive it'. In one powerfully written editorial, one of the best Chartist produced on the subject, the dissenting opposition to the Bill was mocked for its hypocrisy with respect to education and its misrepresentation of the contentious clauses. There can be little doubt that this was a true indication of a Chartist consensus. In 1839 the Chartists had taken over a meeting of the British and Foreign School Society to pass a motion in favour of secular education. A wide variety of Chartist journals made it clear that secular education was the desideratum, the final aim, but, to quote the Northern Star again: 'Let us have education — without clerical ascendancy, if possible — but, in any case, let us have Education.' There was a gross contradiction in calling for an education imbued with Chartist principles while demanding 'a secular education ... unmixed with any theological or peculiar creeds or notions', but it was an inconsistency the Chartists never recognized. Like their middle-class opponents they believed that there were certain undeniable facts concerning moral, social, and political relationships which could legitimately be instilled in the young by means of an educational system.

Women had a particularly important role to play in the process of raising and educating young Chartists and the place of women in society occupied not inconsiderable space in Chartist journals. We cannot discuss
the subject fully here but it is worth noting that within the movement there was a great deal of disagreement over one aspect of women's role and simultaneously a much wider area of general agreement. The controversial point was women's suffrage. The Charter consciously and specifically included adult male suffrage only — partly for tactical reasons, since it was feared that many men would oppose the Charter if it threatened to enfranchise women.\[81\] Even in 1851 Harney sheltered behind the excuse of public opinion in replying to the criticisms made by Anne Knight of Chelmsford concerning the exclusion of women.\[82\] Many male Chartists undoubtedly favoured women's suffrage,\[83\] but the Charter was never extended to cover women. Much more widely recognized was the legitimate role of women in encouraging their menfolk in greater exertions to obtain their own rights. This was in part due to a belief that male radicals had not always received full support from their womenfolk. As Thomas Salt put it, 'they have either not interfered, or persuaded their husbands from meddling with politics, as a thing of no profit. We cannot afford their neutrality or hostility; they must be our enthusiastic friends.'\[84\]

Almost every female Chartist organization saw its function, in the words of the Dunfermline Female Political Union, to 'unite, that our men may be freemen, and not slaves'.\[85\] Woman's 'rights' were often mentioned in unspecific terms, but they should not necessarily be taken to include such matters as the vote.

Woman's rights were more commonly seen in terms of her domestic role and comfort. Male Chartists were by and large agreed that women, 'God's choicest gift, his greatest blessing' to men, were to be 'the presiding divinities of a happy home'. Such a role was seen as providing a more equal status for women.\[86\] Conversely, female labour was condemned as harmful to both sexes: 'When once women are brought to the performance of men's work, farewell to independence and comfort for the working classes.'\[87\] Perhaps as indicative as anything was the report in the Northern Star which regarded the production of twenty-six children in twenty-seven years as a triumph for the righteous anti-Malthusian cause.\[88\] Female Chartists seem to have been prepared to accept this stress on their domestic functions. In an unconsciously ironic phrase the Female Charter Association of Upper Hanley and Smallthorn referred to 'the order of nature inverted, the female driven to the factory to labour for her offspring, and her husband unwillingly idle at home'.\[89\] This was not to say that the role of housewife was to be a subservient one. But equality was taken to mean equality of status, not equality of rights or functions.\[90\]

Female education, then, had two related purposes. One was to prepare girls for their anticipated duties (including raising more young Chartists in their turn); the other was to fit them for a more 'elevated' position in the family and society generally. As one of the leading female Chartist writers, the anonymous 'Sophia' of Birmingham, put it, 'let us, as Chartist women and mothers instruct and encourage each other, that our children shall be better informed of their rights as citizens, that their morals shall
be of a higher order; and that, when the time arrives, when they shall receive those rights they shall be better prepared by the training received from their mothers to enjoy them. Similar arguments were put forward on a number of occasions. The extent to which they asserted the separate claims of women varied but the extent to which they emphasized the central significance of women in raising good citizens for the new society did not.

It would be reasonable to argue that the Chartists, like a wide range of early Victorian groups and individuals, had excessive expectations of a system of popular education. This can be seen most obviously on the rare occasions that Chartists described in any detail the kind of curriculum they expected to see in the schools. Lovett's high schools, for nine to twelve year-olds, were to give a sound moral training, continue the description of social and political relations, the teaching of literacy and numeracy, music, and physical education and, in addition, give a thorough grounding in chemistry, geology, social science, physiology, the laws of health, agriculture, gardening, and vocational skills.

The purposes of such an education could not be better summarized than they were at the time:

We want sound principles. Truth, justice, love, liberty, freedom of conscience, freedom in religion, wise and equal laws, the enjoyment of just rights by all classes of the people, and the education and elevation of the masses to their rightful position as our fellow-creatures before God, and our fellow-subjects and citizens in a free and advancing commonwealth. The millions of England ask for these; — and they must have them.

Yet that statement was not made by a Chartist, but by a leader of the voluntary movement which, in the late 1840s, opposed the introduction of the 'national, universal, gratuitous, and to a certain extent compulsory' system of education which Chartists saw as desirable. This brings us back to those basic problems outlined in the earlier part of this article. It is clear that there were large areas of common ground between the Chartists and other socio-political groups in their approach to education. In terms of aims and methods this area was perhaps larger than that which encompassed the differences. It included a shared concern at the quantitative and qualitative defects of existing facilities, a common belief in the necessity of a government role (the point where the voluntaryists departed from the consensus), but a wariness of making the role of central government too large which was to receive expression in the 1870 Act. There was a common perception of the normative function of education, and both Chartists and middle-class reformers saw this in terms of inculcating notions concerning the 'true' state of social relations, though the divergences over the nature of those relations require further analysis. Thus the study of Chartist attitudes to education serves to underline the cohesive elements in early Victorian Britain rather than the divisive elements which have, to an excessive extent, usually formed the bases of our view of that society. It also reveals the large amount of agreement amongst
the Chartists, again in contrast to the usual stress on divisions; if it also shows that then that agreement masked considerable internal inconsistencies which are unexplained by the orthodox view of Chartism which sees it as part of the labour movement. The traditions and ideas that a Chartist learned from the movement could thus lead to differing models of society, a cohesive one based on consensus as well as a revolutionary one based on class war.

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NOTES


3 For Neale's views on social structure see his *Class and Ideology in the Nineteenth Century*, London, 1972, pp. 15–40.


9 A bibliography of Chartism compiled by J. F. C. Harrison and Dorothy Thompson is due to be published by Harvester Press.

10 But see Prothero, op. cit., and various articles by D. J. Rowe (*Past and Present*, XXXVI (1967), 73–86; *Historical Journal*, XI (1968), 472–87; *Economic History Review*, 2nd. ser., XX (1967), 482–93. These serve to emphasize the need for a fuller study.

11 E.g. see Asa Briggs, 'The Local Background of Chartism' in Briggs, ed., *Chartist Studies*, London, 1959, pp. 1–28. What O'Connor said to P. M. McDouall seems to have been true of many Chartist leaders (especially O'Connor himself): 'he spends a sleepless week between the publication and refutation of slanders or reproach' (*Northern Star*, 2 April 1842).


14 *Red Republican*, 31 August 1850.

15 E.g. see McDouall's *Chartist and Republican Journal*, 22 April 1841.

16 *Northern Star*, 29 August 1840.

17 *Red Republican*, 13 July 1850 (article by 'Howard Morton').


19 E.g. see an address in *Northern Star*, 21 July 1838.

20 *Friend of the People*, 29 March 1851.
21 Northern Star, 14 April 1838.
23 Brian Simon, pp. 243–53, considers this question further.
24 ibid., pp. 177–222, for earlier educational enterprises.
26 e.g. see *English Chartist Circular*, II, 46; *Chartist Circular*, 21 November 1840.
27 *Charter*, 2 June 1839.
28 *Chartist Circular*, 26 October 1839.
29 *Charter*, 10 February 1839.
30 *Northern Star*, 28 December 1844.
32 *Northern Star*, 22 July 1848.
33 e.g. see *Notes to the People*, I, 1851, p. 2; *Northern Star*, 7 April 1838. For a rather different position see an article by Bronterre O’Brien in *McDouall’s Chartist and Republican Journal*, 3 July 1841.
34 *Northern Star*, 31 August 1839.
35 e.g. see Kay-Shuttleworth, pp. 229–33.
36 *Northern Star*, 2 March 1839.
38 *Red Republican*, 20 July 1850.
39 *Northern Star*, 29 January 1848.
40 *Northern Star*, 1 October 1842. For similar expressions of opinion see *Northern Star*, 17 February 1838; *Chartist Circular*, 21 December 1839, 28 December 1839, 26 December 1840; *Friend of the People*, 25 January 1851; *English Chartist Circular*, II, 46. This list is in no way exhaustive but is merely a sample.
41 *Friend of the People*, 11 January 1851.
42 ibid., 25 January 1851; *English Chartist Circular*, II, 46; *Chartist Circular*, 9 October 1841.
43 *English Chartist Circular*, II, 270–1; *Notes to the People*, I, 1851, p. 91.
44 *Red Republican*, 9 November 1850.
45 e.g. see *Northern Star*, 28 July 1838 (lecture by A. J. Dorsey); *The People*, II, 1850, pp. 404–6, 411–3.
47 *Northern Star*, 30 January 1841.
48 ibid., 26 September 1840; *Notes to the People*, I, 1851, p. 181; *English Chartist Circular*, II, 35; ibid., I, 134.
49 *Notes to the People*, II, 1852, p. 890; *The People*, III, 1850, p. 356.
50 *English Chartist Circular*, I, 160.
51 *The People*, III, 1850, p. 356; *Chartist Circular*, 20 March 1841, p. 328.
52 That is, William Lovett’s: see his *Life and Struggles of William Lovett in his Pursuit of Bread, Knowledge and Freedom*, London, 1876, p. 144.
53 *Chartist Circular*, 9 May 1840, p. 135.
54 *Red Republican*, 31 August 1850.
55 *Northern Star*, 29 August 1840.
57 e.g. see the address of the London Working Men’s Association (L.W.M.A.) in Lovett, p. 138; a letter from G. J. Harney and two others in *Northern Star*, 24 March 1838; and *Red Republican*, 22 June 1850.
58 Address of the L.W.M.A. to the working classes of Belgium in Lovett, pp. 98–9. Cf. Kay-Shuttleworth in 1832: ‘The poor might thus be also made to understand their political position in society’ (Kay-Shuttleworth, p. 63).
59 *Notes to the People*, I, 1851, 91.
60 *Chartist Circular*, 21 November 1840.
61 *Red Republican*, 23 November 1850.
62 *Cooper’s Journal*, 5 January 1850; *Northern Star*, 28 December 1844 (article by
'Young England').

63 Red Republican, 3 August 1850 (article by 'Howard Morton').
64 Northern Star, 17 February 1849.
66 Charter, 3 February 1839.
68 Northern Star, 30 January 1841.
69 Red Republican, 9 November 1850.
70 Lovett, Life and Struggles, pp. 139–41.
72 Northern Star, 28 December 1844.
73 ibid., 24 April 1847.
74 ibid., 8 June 1850.
75 ibid., 2 March 1850.
76 ibid., 29 April 1843.
77 ibid., 25 March 1843. Also see editorials on 15 April, 22 April, and 6 May 1843.
78 ibid., 7 September 1839.
79 ibid., 22 April 1843.
80 The phrase occurs in the 1839 resolution. For other examples of Chartist adherence to secular education see Charter, 16 June 1839; National Instructor, 11 January 1851; Labourer, May 1847, pp. 236–7; Cooper’s Journal (articles by Frank Grant); Chartist Circular, 23 November 1839; George Howell, A History of the Working Men’s Association from 1836-1850, edited with an introduction by D. J. Rowe, Newcastle, 1972, p. 87.
81 The People’s Charter: with the Address to the Radical Reformers of Great Britain and Ireland, and brief sketch of its origin, London, 1848, p. 9.
82 Friend of the People, 8 March 1851.
83 e.g. see a report of an interesting meeting in Reading where one Chartist lecturer encountered considerable criticism of his opposition to female suffrage (Northern Star, 24 October 1846). The supporters of female suffrage seem more likely to have been the artisans like W. J. Linton and William Lovett.
84 Northern Star, 5 May 1838. Cf. an address by the L.W.M.A. in 1836 reprinted in Lovett, p. 96.
85 Northern Star, 9 February 1839.
86 Address to the women of London from a Metropolitan Delegate meeting in Northern Star, 10 September 1842.
87 Red Republican, 7 September 1850. For similar views see English Chartist Circular, II, 27; ibid., I, 49.
88 Northern Star, 7 December 1839.
89 ibid., 29 January 1842.
90 It may well be that the strongest insistence on a wider interpretation of women’s rights would be found amongst middle-class radical groups (see, for example, a powerful article by Mrs Percy Sinnett in People’s Journal, 31 July 1847). It is also possible that within the movement the social centre of gravity of female Chartism tended to be higher than that of male Chartism and that the more radical females tended to be middle-class. There is clearly a need for further work on this topic.
91 English Chartist Circular, I, 76. ‘Sophia’ is never identified but she reveals that she was a child in the 1790s and came from a staunch Tory family in Acton, her three older brothers all becoming army officers in that decade (a colonel, a major, and a lieutenant respectively). She also claimed to have been ‘a mother and guardian to a great number of children’ (see the above reference and also English Chartist Circular, I, 129).
92 e.g. see Northern Star, 30 January 1841; English Chartist Circular, I, 87–88 (‘Sophia’ again); Chartist Circular, 23 November 1839.
93 Lovett, pp. 143–4. The editors of the Chartist Circular showed a similar lack of comprehension of the ordinary child’s abilities (Chartist Circular, 26 October 1839).
95 The phrase occurs in the programme of action adopted by the 1851 Chartist Convention (Friend of the People, 12 April 1851).

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