

A level History Coursework marking training – Module 4

Script C (part 1)

Coursework authentication sheet

Pearson Edexcel Level 3 Advanced GCE in History	
Assignment title: Historians have disagreed on the nature of Chartism. What is your view on the nature of Chartism?	
Have you received advice on the title from the Assignment guidance service?	N
Centre name: [REDACTED]	Centre number: [REDACTED]
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State the examined options that are being taken: Paper 1: 1B: England, 1509–1603: authority, nation and religion Paper 2: 2B.1: Luther and the German Reformation, c1515–55 Paper 3: 36.1: Protest, agitation and parliamentary reform in Britain, c1780–1928	
Mark awarded	Comments [<i>Comment box expands as you start entering text</i>]
32	<p>Explanation and supporting evidence for Thompson is well selected and well explained. Highlights the key differences between historians and explores school of thought and the impact this has. Also uses geographical criteria for further analysis.</p> <p>Analysis of Steadman Jones includes further exploration between the views of historians and some use of contextual knowledge. However, there are some weaknesses in this section where certain points are not supported by significant content knowledge, and interesting points of analysis are partially substantiated. A judgement is reached about the views of this historian.</p> <p>Royle's views are effectively compared, and this is a particularly effective section with integrated contextual knowledge and supplementary evidence also used in support. The view of the historian is clearly articulated using the established criteria.</p> <p>Further analysis of historians focusing on different schools of thought offers an engaging perspective. These also link to the criteria established at the start of the coursework and elements of this is</p>

	<p>effectively woven together with knowledge about the three main historians.</p> <p>The criteria established at the start of the coursework are referenced throughout and are applied when making interim judgements about each historian, and in the conclusion.</p> <p>Overall, very good content knowledge is used in relation to some of the issues and where this is done, it is integrated well in the discussion of aspects of the debate, however this is not always consistent.</p> <p>The coursework is generally well written and communicated with clarity, however in a few places it lacks coherence and precision.</p>
Word count	4762

Historians have disagreed on the nature of Chartism. What is your view on the nature of Chartism?

Introduction

The 19th century marked a new era in British politics; growing radicalism and political education led to the increased mobilisation of various extra-parliamentary groups. Chartism was a movement aimed at alleviating the struggles of the working class through gaining political representation in parliament and was most active between 1838 and 1848. Chartism was largely motivated by ongoing economic issues, as well as legislation like the 1815 Corn Laws, the 1832 Reform Act, and the 1834 Poor Law Amendment Act, viewed by much of the working class as ineffective, unsatisfying, and harsh. Aided by working-class press like *The Northern Star*, *The Poor Man's Guardian*, and *The Birmingham Journal*, leaders such as Feargus O'Connor and William Lovett, as well as radical reformers like Thomas Paine helped Chartism gain mass popular support, peaking in the Chartist petition of 1842, signed by over 3.3 million people.

The nature of Chartism has remained controversial since its inception; when J.R Stephens spoke in Manchester in 1838, he declared Chartism a 'knife and fork question'¹, heavily emphasising the economic importance of the movement. William Lovett and the members of the London Working Men's Association who drafted the Charter in 1838² instead focused on the undeniable natural political rights of man, and the importance of Chartism in achieving their democratic and political aims. Modern historians still debate the nature of Chartism, with a wide variety of conclusions drawn. Three of the most prominent viewpoints on the nature of Chartism are represented through the interpretations of Dorothy Thompson, Gareth Stedman Jones, and Edward Royle.

¹

<http://www.historyhome.co.uk/peel/chartism/whatchar.htm#:~:text=Chartism's%20strength%20peaked%20in%20times,in%20favour%20of%20universal%20suffrage>

² <https://victorianweb.org/history/hist3.html>

Dorothy Thompson presents the view that Chartism is strictly a working-class movement linked to class consciousness and unity, and focuses on the role of language in defining Chartism as a working-class movement with political aspirations and economic motivations. Contrastingly, Gareth Steadman Jones argues that Chartism was entirely a political movement, rather than a socio-economic movement defined by class. Royle then argues that Chartism was both an economic and political movement, disagreeing with the idea of a working-class consciousness but emphasising the idea of working and middle-class unity.

When considering the nature of Chartism I will consider the major factors of class, politics, economics, and geographical variation in defining the nature of Chartism. There are additional minor factors like moral and physical force, but these are less significant when determining the nature of Chartism. I consider Chartism as the first mass movement of the working class in British history, a working-class political movement with geographical variations in economic and tactical aims.

Dorothy Thompson

Dorothy Thompson presents the view that Chartism is inherently linked to class consciousness and early socialist theory, and focuses on the role of language in defining Chartism as a working-class movement with political aspirations and economic motivations. She argues that the role of language is incredibly important in defining the nature of Chartism. Politics had, until then, been the property of the upper class. The location of the monarchy and the government in the South had ensured that there was little political representation from the North of England and much of the provinces. Various national reform acts were passed to improve the political representation of the British peoples by redrawing borough lines and modifying electorate qualifications, but certainly until the mid-19th century and later, the South of England was overrepresented in politics. This political imbalance was worsened by the economic divide between the North and South. The newly developed industrial towns were largely composed of the working classes, who had been severely affected by the failures of the Tories and then the Whigs through legislation like the Poor Law Amendment Act and the Corn Laws in dealing with the waves of severe economic distress and political turmoil. Disillusionment with the 1832 Reform Act, which failed to enfranchise working-class men and increased the tensions between

the lower and middle classes, pushed many towards radical politics. These conditions help explain the popularity of Chartism in the North and provinces, and then the growing representation of the working class in politics. The language used in Chartist meetings from leaders like Feargus O'Connor was atypical for contemporary political meetings. These radicals did not talk like the Southerners; politicians, liberal or conservative, disapproved of the "rash, theatrical, and violent rhetoric"³ of the Chartists. Thompson's argument is reinforced by the account of one Owenite missionary, Lloyd Jones⁴, who found the Chartist R.J Richardson "almost uncouth by his rude provincialism of speech and awkwardness of manner"⁵.

Thompson also argues that this change in political language was not necessarily only in terms of dialect and accent, but in aims and goals - 'concepts of manhood suffrage, the rights of man and the equality of citizenship'⁶ were seen as unique to the working class. This defines the nature of Chartism as one separate from previous movements, as it was a wholly working-class movement. This argument is undermined by evidence provided by Royle, who shows that there were "honorary members admitted" into the London Working Men's Association "from the provinces and higher classes" - members such as "Place, Black, MP August Beaumont, and MP Colonel Perronet Thompson"⁷. Middle and upper-class men continued to have leadership positions until the shift to physical force in 1839, after which most left. These men had a role in establishing the Charter, and so Chartism cannot be argued as an entirely working-class movement, at least in its conception. However, the origins are less significant when determining the nature of Chartism, since there was a significant shift in the nature of Chartism after 1839 due to the moral and physical force debate, as well as emerging geographical differences between the aims of Chartists. Due to this change in the nature of Chartism, Thompson's argument regarding language and class unity is still convincing.

Thompson proposes that Chartism showed the development of class consciousness. The theme of 'class consciousness' was first theorised by Karl Marx, and involves the "awareness by a

³ The Dignity of Chartism, Dorothy Thompson

⁴ <https://link.springer.com/content/pdf/bbm%3A978-0-230-37648-9%2FI.pdf>

⁵ The Dignity of Chartism, Dorothy Thompson

⁶ The Dignity of Chartism, Dorothy Thompson

⁷ Chartism, E Royle

social or economic class of their position and interests within the structure of the economic order and social system in which they live.”⁸ Thompson argues that this class consciousness was developed through the growing political education of the working class, aided by the influence of radical political writers and orators. Thomas Paine’s *Rights of Man* strongly influenced William Lovett and other founders of Chartism in their belief that the demands of the charter were part of inalienable human rights. William Cobbett was another influential writer; Lovett wrote that his book *Legacy to Labourers* was the “charter and title-deed to their rights”⁹. Chartist leaders saw themselves as representing a class of people. Feargus O'Connor wrote in the *Northern Star* in 1846 that “Chartism means poverty”, as is a consequence of “class legislation”. Thompson argued that the Chartists recognised that financial exploitation of the upper class was manifested in political control, conveying her belief in the political aims and economic motivations of Chartism. Chartist newspapers such as *The Northern Star*, *The Poor Man’s Guardian*, and *The Charter* helped educate the lower class about political events in language they could understand. The role of the press played particular importance after defining events in working-class politics such as The Peterloo Massacre (St Peter’s Field), which greatly angered the working class and inspired further action. The War of the Unstamped, one of the first (and last) Chartist victories against the government, demonstrates the widespread passion for this Chartist literature, and the importance it held in educating the working classes. At its peak in 1839, the *Northern Star* was selling 48,000 copies a week, showing the widened interest in working-class politics.

Thompson also argues that class consciousness and political education helped to achieve class unity. Thompson’s criteria of class unity is unity within the working class itself. This unity is displayed in the nationwide organisation of Chartists, shown in the foundation of the National Charter Association, which consisted of a nationally-elected executive council with localities on the town level. The NCA stood or endorsed dozens of candidates during the 1841 General Election, and had 50,000 members by 1842. Another nationwide collaboration was shown in the May 1838 Glasgow meeting, where the London Working Men’s Association and the Birmingham Political Union joined 200,000 others and agreed to join forces and adopt a

⁸ <https://www.thoughtco.com/class-consciousness-3026135>

⁹ William Cobbett, his children, and Chartism, Grande, J Stevenson

common programme. This nationwide organisation and education indicates that class consciousness and unity had been developed, although Thompson's argument may be too strongly influenced by her background in socialist and communist politics, perhaps over signifying the significance of this national unity. The later growth of significant divisions within Chartism due to differences in aims and tactics (regarding moral and physical force) indicates that Thompson overestimates the extent of class unity reached. However, Thompson's argument regarding the development of a class consciousness remains convincing, as the definition of class consciousness had been achieved.

Thompson also considers the importance of geographical variation when defining the nature of Chartism. She identifies the differences in aims and therefore nature of the different cities and industries. Thompson rejects some historians' focus on localism, arguing that it reinforced the notion that Chartism was a protest movement rather than an "extraordinarily articulate and disciplined"¹⁰ political movement. London was significant for political campaigners as it was the home of the government, but "it was the provinces that provided the dynamism and generated the popular support"¹¹ for Chartism. The leadership began with the London Working Men's Association, but Chartism itself grew popular through province support. The aims of London and Northern Chartists also differed strongly. Thompson refers to the "campaign in the North", as well as rural areas of declining industry, being "more the nature of a crusade" being more likely to use physical force than the "London artisans", whose "political reform movement...was based on a sense of outraged national rights"¹². They were also more likely to speak about the economic motivations behind Chartism. J.R Stephens, a leading Northern Chartist, likened "universal suffrage" to "as many wages as will keep [a man] in the employment of many"¹³. This reflects the economically based focus of Northern Chartists, contrasting to Southern Chartists who were more focused on the political and ideological aims of Chartism. Overall, Thompson argues that different areas had different aims and methods of achieving them through protest, but that they were all striving to achieve the same points of the People's Charter, further emphasising her theory of working-class unity.

¹⁰ The Dignity of Chartism, Dorothy Thompson

¹¹ The Dignity of Chartism, Dorothy Thompson

¹² The Dignity of Chartism, Dorothy Thompson

¹³ The Dignity of Chartism, Dorothy Thompson

Gareth Stedman Jones

Gareth Stedman Jones proposes a contrasting view, arguing that Chartism was entirely a political movement, rather than a socio-economic movement defined by class. Stedman Jones argues that the Chartist language of class does not fall under Marxist thinking of class consciousness, opposing Thompson and Sewell's socialist view. He also opposes Thompson's view on language, arguing that Chartist political language was a continuation of the language used by earlier radical political movements.

Stedman Jones argues that Chartism has to be understood as a political movement defined by the relations of an oppressed group to the state, as opposed to a socioeconomic movement defined by class. The six demands of the People's Charter were all political - universal manhood suffrage, equal electoral districts, vote by ballot, annually elected parliaments, payment of members of parliament, and abolition of the property qualifications for membership. None of the aims were aimed specifically at relieving economic issues, such as the establishment of a national minimum wage. The founders of Chartism were more focused on political issues and did not intend Chartism to become so defined by economic issues. This view is supported by E Royle, who states that the declaration of a 'knife and fork question' by Joseph Rayner Stephens in 1838 was a "far cry"¹⁴ from the origins of Chartism. Stedman Jones argues that the fall of Chartism shows its nature in the first instance. In the 1840s, Sir Robert Peel's government began to reform social and economic legislation without actually reforming parliament. Chartist leaders had linked economic deprivation and political power, but as Sir Robert Peel's reforms went on, the movement lost support. However, Stedman Jones's interpretation is undermined by the fact that Chartism gained more popularity in times of economic deprivation. This is shown by the correlation between times of economic stress and the increase in signatures on Chartist politics. The times of economic distress and famine are from 1837-42, and 1847-48¹⁵, which correlated with the Chartism petitions of 1839 (1.25 million signatures), 1842 (3.3 million signatures), and 1848 (2 million signatures). Even if Chartism was a political movement, one of

¹⁴ Chartism, E. Royle

¹⁵ Business Cycles, Harvests, and Politics: 1790-1850, W.W. Rostow

its primary motivations for support was economic issues. As this is a significant factor in determining the nature of Chartism, it cannot be argued that Chartism was entirely political.

Stedman Jones presents that “the language of class is the language of radicalism”¹⁶, and that there was no difference between Chartist political language and the political terminology of previous movements; it is simply a continuation of the language of eighteenth and early nineteenth-century radicalism. This opposes Thompson’s view on the importance of language, who believes that Chartists formed their political language. Stedman Jones argues that there were several developing political vocabularies in politics at the time, and the term “class” was used in many of them. However, Stedman Jones’s argument on the language of Chartism is less convincing, as it doesn’t discuss the linguistic nature of Chartism itself, in terms of syntax, accent, and meaning, simply focusing instead on what terms the Chartists used. Stedman Jones’s argument on language aims to undermine the nature of Chartism as a separate working-class movement with a working-class vocabulary, but his argument is undermined by his lack of insight into the linguistic nature of Chartism, as well as its status as a working-class movement. Thompson is more convincing, as she focuses more on the accents and wider vocabulary used by Chartists, arguing the differences between northerners and southerners (for example accents, or vocabulary regarding physical force) were significant in establishing Chartism as a working-class movement with its own language. Thompson’s focus on Chartism having its own political vocabulary is supported by the fact that other politicians, Whig and Conservative, recognised differences between their own and Chartist vocabulary and accents.

Stedman Jones also believes that there was not as strong a working-class consciousness as argued by Thompson. Royle and Stedman Jones agree there remained a further need for working-class political education. Lovett, after being imprisoned for sedition in 1839 after the Bull Ring riots in Birmingham, formed the National Association Promoting the Political and Social Improvement of the People. Lovett believed that education was the key to fulfilling the points of the people’s charter. Lovett’s ‘Knowledge Chartism’, as it was called by its opponents, was not supported by many local organisations or most of the Chartist leadership. This shows

¹⁶ Rethinking the Language of Class, Gareth Stedman Jones

that further political and social education was viewed as unnecessary, which detracts from Thompson's view of a politically educated working class. This also indicates that there was less class unity than Thompson suggests, and less interaction between the middle and lower classes than Royle suggests too. Chartism faded into obscurity by 1850, largely due to the divided working class. Chartism largely failed to gain the support of the "aristocracy of labour"¹⁷ (highly skilled craftsmen) and amongst agricultural labourers in the countryside. In Suffolk, for example, Chartism was active in the large town of Ipswich but had very little support in rural villages or the fishing ports. Co-ordinating national efforts amongst small and isolated towns was near impossible, especially considering the differences in approaches to protest. Chartism also failed to gain widespread support amongst trade unions, one of the most important political representations of the working class. The issues that caused Chartism's failure also help to explain its divided nature. Stedman Jones is less convincing in his argument against Chartist language, but more convincing in his arguments against working-class unity. However, the nature of Chartism did not remain static throughout its existence. Various changes in support, tactics, and motivations influenced a shifting nature over time. Stedman Jones analyses the later, more divided years of Chartism when deciding its nature. Dorothy Thompson focuses more on the earlier years of Chartism when the movement was more united. The differences in their focus account for the difference in their conclusions.

Overall, Stedman Jones presents a contrasting view to previous and later scholars. He dismisses left-wing notions of class consciousness, class unity, and the idea of Chartism having its political language. His link made between Peele's economic social reforms and the following decline of Chartism does indicate that Chartism was of a political nature, but his dismissal of the different language of Chartism and later economic motivations makes his argument weaker in places.

Edward Royle

Royle proposes that Chartism was both an economic and political movement, but that political and economic motivations were found in different groups of support and leadership within Chartism, emphasising geographical variation and class unity. He analyses the nature of

¹⁷ Rethinking the Chartists: Searching for Synthesis in the Historiography of Chartism, Miles Taylor

Chartism by examining what the political education of the working class was before and after Chartism if the working class have more interest in economic issues or abstract political concepts; where was the support base of Chartism was found; and where the leadership of Chartism was found.

Royle also has a more optimistic view of class unity in Chartism than Thompson. Royle has different criteria of the definition of class unity than Thompson does. Royle describes class unity as the collaboration between the lower and middle classes, whereas Thompson describes class unity as being within the working class itself, and argues against the role of the middle class in Chartism. A criticism of his argument is that he makes generalisations as to the extent to which middle-class people were accepted into Chartism. His view is undermined by contemporary accounts; leaders made it clear that Chartism was a working-class movement, through speaking against the middle and upper classes on a variety of occasions, such as describing the movement as “an insurrection which is expressly directed against the middle classes”¹⁸. Chartist middle-class participation in the movement also decreased over time, as shown by the fact that “17 middle-class leaders appeared at Manchester Chartist events 3 or more times between September 1838 and March 1839, but only 3 appeared so frequently from March to July”¹⁹. There was a collaboration between the working class and the lower-middle class, but not to the extent that Royle portrays it.

One area where Thompson and Royle disagree is on the subject of working-class consciousness and the language used in political spaces. Royle casts ‘grave doubts’ over the claim that the Chartists were politically conscious, whereas Thompson puts great emphasis on the working class awakening and the establishment of class consciousness. One of Royle’s established criteria was examining whether the political education of the working class changed with Chartist influence. Thompson agrees that it did, whereas Royle prefers to recognise other influences and argues that to a certain extent, people only “absorbed” what they read or heard, not truly “understanding”²⁰ the material (such as in the case of Thomas Paine). Royle and

¹⁸ <https://victorianweb.org/history/chartism/2.html>

¹⁹ Physical-Force Chartism: The Cotton District and the Chartist Crisis of 1839, Robert Sykes

²⁰ Chartism, E. Royle

Thompson partially agree on the amount of collaboration between the working and middle classes. Thompson theorises that the “almost total lack of information available to the authorities in many areas suggests a considerable degree of community participation”²¹, and provides examples of effective boycotts of shopkeepers who gave evidence against Joseph Raynor Stephens (arrested in November 1838 for speaking at an unlawful meeting); the success of shopkeepers, and the escape of many involved in the Newport Rising. Thompson’s argument is more convincing than Royle’s on this matter, as the popularity of reformist literature and Chartist newspapers does indicate some level of working-class political education, while the popularity of organisations like the National Charter Association and the Birmingham Political Union indicates a higher level of working-class unity than Royle suggests, who instead focuses on collaboration between the middle and lower classes. However, it is reductive to view class unity within the middle and upper classes as the most significant factor when determining the nature of Chartism. Royle’s argument is largely defined by the factors of

Views of other historians

There have been a wide range of interpretations presented by other historians. They provide a selection of views focusing on different elements of Chartism, such as the Marxist perspective of Chartism, the importance of regional diversity within the movement, and the split between moral and physical force and how it affected the nature of the movement.

One view often offered by Marxist historians, such as Rob Sewell, was that Chartism was the world’s first conscious working-class movement, indicating the arrival of the socialist transformation of the working class. This view was originally perpetrated by Engels, who wrote of Chartism as a “social movement”²² rather than necessarily a political one. Sewell argues that Chartism was a “revolutionary movement”²³ that “represented a display of working-class consciousness.” Sewell uses an account from Lieutenant Colonel Pringle Taylor to illustrate his point about the revolutionary power of Chartism, who described Chartism as “a spark [which would] would ignite the combustible material and bring upon us all the horrors of servile (civil)

²¹ The Dignity of Chartism, D Thompson

²² Rethinking the Chartists: Searching for Synthesis in the Historiography of Chartism, Miles Taylor

²³ Chartist Revolution, Rob Sewell

war”²⁴. Thompson and Stedman Jones both disagree to varying degrees about the Marxist perspective on the nature of Chartism. Thompson identifies the argument of Marxists to say that ‘true working-class movements’ must be based on a ‘programme of the expropriation of the expropriators’, which Chartism was not. Stedman Jones then argues that Marxist definitions of class do not match with Chartist ideology. Chartism’s most prominent newspapers had aspects of what would later be referred to as Ricardian socialism, which defines economic exploitation as taking place not at the point of production but through a politically based system of unequal exchange. Chartism, therefore, disagrees with Marxism at its very definition. Stedman Jones also argues that Chartist language followed the vocabulary of radicalism rather than the “class-based language of socialism”²⁵. The arguments of Thompson and Stedman Jones disprove the theory that Chartism was of Marxist or socialist nature.

Localism is a branch of thought focusing on the application of Chartism at a regional scale. Asa Briggs emphasises the importance of studying national and local - she states that any “study of Chartism must begin with a proper appreciation of regional and local diversity”²⁶. She identifies the main appeal of Chartism in areas of dying industry and declining trades, such as Wiltshire and handloom weaving, respectively. Thompson, as opposed to Briggs, says that the emphasis should be placed on “the large areas of the national agreement”²⁷. Brigg’s argument is less convincing, as this local focus can become overly emphasised on examining regional deviation, rather than analysing the importance of the national structure of Chartism. It also provides no analysis of the economic and political balance of Chartism, which is the main characteristic of the debate on the nature of the movement.

Edward Sykes also focuses on the geographical variation for support of moral versus physical force when defining the nature of Chartism, but extends his argument by discussing the influence that regional differences had on the political aims of Chartism. Sykes describes the increase in militancy in early 1839 as an “acute crisis”, created by the contrast between the

²⁴ Chartist Revolution, Rob Sewell

²⁵ Rethinking the Language of Class, Gareth Stedman Jones

²⁶ Chartism, Asa Briggs

²⁷ The Dignity of Chartism, D Thompson

“increasingly militant Chartist movement” and the “more active repression”²⁸ from the government. Sykes provides a sense of nuance to the ‘moral versus physical force’ debate, specifying that there was much deviation amongst Chartists on what was seen as an appropriate degree of “constitutional agitation”²⁹. Manchester cotton factory workers tended to follow more violent proto-Marxist revolutionaries, while in Yorkshire domestic woollen workers also placed value on physical force leaders such as Feargus O'Connor, whereas in London Chartist leadership was composed more of moderates favouring moral force. In the 1840s, the Moral Force Campaign came under attack from people like Joseph Rayner Stephens, Feargus O'Connor and James Bronterre O'Brien. Sykes argues that some Chartists presented the move towards physical force and the “policy of mass arming” as “defensive” and “constitutional”³⁰, while proponents of moral force were strictly against it. The move towards militancy and the split between moral and physical force affected the nature of the movement, as well as society and the government’s perception of the movement. While the focus on moral and physical force is a less significant factor when defining the nature of Chartism, the transition to physical force is why most middle-class members had left the movement by the end of 1838. Sykes’s view is effective when arguing the importance of the moral and physical force debate when defining the nature of later Chartism, but it is not useful for defining the movement through the perspective of class.

Another view is that Chartism was almost entirely a political movement. Eric Evans argues that “Chartists wanted a say in how Britain was governed”³¹, rather than focusing on economic reform and social issues. The Chartists were disillusioned by political failures such as the outcome of the 1832 Reform Acts, but they also strongly opposed Whig attacks on issues such as the rights of trade unions and their failure to provide effective reform of factory conditions. The six aims of the People’s Charter were all politically based, with no calls “for a minimum wage”, “additional rights for trade unionists”, or for the “abolition of the new poor law”³². By convincing the working class of Britain that these issues would be solved once political

²⁸ Physical-Force Chartism: The Cotton District and the Chartist Crisis of 1839, Edward Sykes

²⁹ Physical-Force Chartism: The Cotton District and the Chartist Crisis of 1839, Edward Sykes

³⁰ Physical-Force Chartism: The Cotton District and the Chartist Crisis of 1839, Edward Sykes

³¹ Chartism, Eric Evans

³² Chartism, Eric Evans

representation was achieved, Chartists were able to use economic issues as a boost in support. However, the argument that Chartism was largely political is undermined by the fact that Chartist support was highest during times of economic stress - Amy J. Lloyd argues that "Chartism was only a mass movement in times of depression"³³. This is further evident by the fact that support for Chartism drastically dropped once the government passed various economic reforms after 1848. This demonstrates the clear economic motivations of Chartism, and its importance in defining its nature.

Conclusion

There is a wide variety of historical interpretations of the nature of Chartism. The combination of the factors of class, politics, and economics when defining the nature of Chartism provides an interesting nuance to interpretations. I believe that Chartism was a working-class political movement, with a shift in nature over time provided by geographical variations in economic and tactical aims. Chartism aided in the development of working-class consciousness, but divisions in Chartism due to differences regarding aims and tactics emphasised the lack of class unity, both within the working class, argued by Thompson, and between the working and middle classes, argued by Royle. I believe that geographical variations in Chartism were significant in determining its nature, as the movement was more political or economic depending on which region is studied. Northern Chartists were more focused on economic issues and would use physical violence to achieve their aims, whereas London Chartists were more focused on political issues, and favoured moral force. This regional difference helps account for some of the variations in historical interpretations, as shown in the differences in interpretations between Stedman Jones (who uses the example of Suffolk) and Sykes (who uses the example of Manchester).

Thompson's argument on Chartism being a working-class movement is more convincing than Stedman Jones and Royle's on the same topic. Thompson emphasises the concepts of class consciousness, as well as using the increased circulation of working-class Chartist newspapers to reinforce her argument that the working class had indeed become significantly more

³³ Lloyd, Amy J.: "Chartism." British Library Newspapers. Detroit: Gale, 2007.

politically educated throughout the movement. Evidence provided by Thompson undermines Royle's conclusions on class unity, portraying the lack of middle-class representation in Chartism post-1839. On the overall matter of whether there was class unity, however, both Thompson and Royle's explanations fall slightly short. Stedman Jones convincingly argues that geographical variation in support, disagreement over moral and physical force, as well as differing political and economic aims regionally and nationally proves that Chartism was not a united movement, and so cannot be described as a representation of class unity. On the economic nature of Chartism, Stedman Jones's argument falls short. The economic motivations for Chartism are too significant to ignore when determining its nature, as shown by Royle, and other historians like Amy J. Lloyd. The nature of Chartism has been debated by contemporaries and historians, with many factors contributing to a range of conclusions drawn. This research suggests that it is difficult to isolate any one factor, but the most important factor defining the nature of Chartism is that of class, and that the significance of Chartism being the first mass movement of the working class striving to escape financial and political exploitation cannot be understated.

Word Count: 4762

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