

**CHARTIST POLITICAL CULTURE IN BRITAIN  
AND COLONIAL AUSTRALIA, c. 1835-1860**

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## Introduction

### Historians, Chartism and Australia

Robert Gammage concluded the second (1894) edition of his pioneering *History of the Chartist movement* by listing the fates of prominent activists such as Feargus O'Connor, John Collins, William Lovett, Henry Vincent, John Taylor, J.R. Stephens, James Leach and Christopher Doyle. 'Besides these', he lamented, 'there are a host of men once active in the Chartist movement, who are resting in the tomb; and a large host of others, who emigrated to foreign lands'.<sup>1</sup> For Gammage, it would seem, emigration amounted to a kind of political death.

Much has been written on Chartism since Gammage wrote the first edition of his *History* in 1854-5. For the last forty years or so the first modern mass-movement has been painstakingly dissected by historians, sociologists, literary critics and other scholars.<sup>2</sup> Chartist historians have also made major contributions to the 'linguistic turn' in social history that has taken place since the early 1980s.<sup>3</sup> Yet despite the comparative maturity, breadth and extent of the literature that now exists, a firmly domestic outlook continues to characterise the genre. In short, Chartist historians have failed to consider the colonial ramifications of the movement. The odd publication written from this perspective has, of course, appeared over the years.<sup>4</sup> But these

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<sup>1</sup> R.G. Gammage, *History of the Chartist movement, 1837-1854* (New York, 1969 rep.), pp. 401-2.

<sup>2</sup> For bibliographical information generally see J.F.C. Harrison and D. Thompson, eds., *Bibliography of the Chartist movement, 1837-1976* (Sussex, 1978); O. Ashton, R. Fyson, and S. Roberts, eds., *The Chartist movement: a new annotated bibliography* (London, 1995).

<sup>3</sup> These contributions will be dealt with in chapter one.

<sup>4</sup> For examples see J. Belchem, 'The spy system in 1848: Chartists and informers – an Australian connection', *Labour History*, 39 (1980), pp. 15-27; J. Belchem, 'Chartist informers in Australia: the nemesis of Thomas Powell', *Labour History*, 43 (1982), pp. 83-98; P. Pickering, "'Glimpses of Eternal Truth:" Chartism, poetry and the young H.R. Nicholls', *Labour History*, 70 (1996), pp. 53-70. For an American perspective see R. Boston, *British Chartists in America* (Manchester, 1970).

contributions remain little more than the curiosities of a very large literature. Some of the assumptions embedded in Gammage's *History*, it would seem, linger today.

An indication of the domestic limits of Chartist historiography can be found in Miles Taylor's 1996 review of contemporary interpretative trends, and especially in his recommendations for future research.<sup>5</sup> The purpose of Taylor's essay is to reconcile the currently antagonistic 'social' (or class-based) and 'cultural' (or language-based) interpretations that have developed in the wake of Gareth Stedman Jones' controversial 1982-3 re-appraisals of Chartism.<sup>6</sup> This 'impasse' will be discussed in more detail in the next chapter. At present, however, it will be useful to reiterate Taylor's understanding of the 'four main problem areas which are worthy of the attention of future historians of Chartism'.<sup>7</sup> A significant part of his essay outlines changing views of the Hanoverian and early Victorian state, which also have implications for the way we look at Chartism. For example, the quite divergent responses by successive administrations to the heroic phases of Chartist mass-mobilisation (1838-9, 1841-2, 1847-8) are subjects we need to know more about – particularly as Stedman Jones and the leading exponent of the class-oriented approach to Chartism, Dorothy Thompson, treat the subject quite differently.<sup>8</sup> A second theme

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<sup>5</sup> M. Taylor, 'Rethinking the chartists: searching for synthesis in the historiography of chartism', *The Historical Journal*, 39 (1996), pp. 479-95.

<sup>6</sup> G. Stedman Jones, 'The language of Chartism' in J. Epstein and D. Thompson, eds., *The Chartist experience: studies in working-class radicalism and culture, 1830-60* (London, 1982), pp. 3-58; This essay was expanded in G. Stedman Jones, 'Rethinking Chartism' in *Languages of class: studies in English working class history, 1832-1982* (Cambridge, 1983), pp. 90-178.

<sup>7</sup> Taylor, 'Rethinking the chartists', p. 491.

<sup>8</sup> D. Thompson, *The Chartists: popular politics in the industrial revolution* (Aldershot, 1986). For 1848 see also J. Belchem, '1848: Feargus O'Connor and the collapse of the mass-platform' in J. Epstein and D. Thompson, eds., *The Chartist experience: studies in working-class radicalism and culture, 1830-60* (London, 1982), pp. 269-310; H.G. Weisser, *April 10: challenge and response in England in 1848* (Lanham, 1983); J. Saville, *1848: the British state and the Chartist movement* (Cambridge, 1987).

that deserves greater attention is ‘the geography of Chartism’.<sup>9</sup> By this Taylor means the ‘complex dynamics between locality and centre’ in Britain, in particular the internal relationship between Chartist lecturing and local organisation and the external relationships between Chartism and other radical movements.<sup>10</sup> Taylor also argues that more work remains to be done on radical democratic political economy, and on attempts made by activists to put their ideals of representative democracy into practice at the local level.<sup>11</sup> The final problem is our understanding of Chartism’s decline. As Taylor remarks, ‘1848 was clearly a very different kind of movement’ to that of the early 1840s, ‘and we need to know more about the change of personnel and strategy’.<sup>12</sup>

It is difficult to argue with any of these propositions as far as they go. But despite his explicit emphasis upon the geography of Chartism, Taylor does not even hint at the possibility (or value) of looking more closely at the international ramifications of the movement.<sup>13</sup> That said, any attempt at extending class-based analyses beyond Britain would seem to raise a number of problems. However refined, the foundations of the traditional study of Chartism – concepts such as class, class-consciousness, the continuities implicit in themes such as community, tradition, custom, industrial organisation and so forth – often do not make much sense when transposed to a new environment, particularly the environment treated in the latter stages of this thesis, the Australian goldrushes.

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<sup>9</sup> See P. Howell, “‘Diffusing the light of liberty’: the geography of political lecturing in the Chartist movement”, *Journal of Historical Geography*, 21 (1995), pp. 23-38. See also D. Jones, *Chartism and the Chartists* (London, 1975), pp. 102-12.

<sup>10</sup> Taylor, ‘Rethinking the chartists’, p. 492.

<sup>11</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 492-3.

<sup>12</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 493-4.

<sup>13</sup> On this point generally see A. Messner, ‘Land, leadership, culture, and emigration: some problems in Chartist historiography’, *The Historical Journal*, 42 (1999), pp. 1093-1109.

Consider briefly the antipodean fate of an organised trade with close links to Chartism such as the stonemasons. Despite customary restrictions upon political activity, the radical allegiance of the building trades had been publicly recognised in 1841, when a now little-known Chartist national petition bearing over 1,300,000 signatures was carried to the Commons by eighteen masons (some of whom were then employed building the new Houses of Parliament) dressed in fustian jackets.<sup>14</sup> Over the next decade or so workers in the building trades emigrated to Australia in significant numbers, forming one of the first craft unions in Melbourne in November 1850.<sup>15</sup> Yet according to the early Australian labour historian W.E. Murphy,

The new society, which met once a fortnight, numbered about fifty members till the gold-fever, which broke out some ten months later, proved fatal to all existing calculations, and with the exodus of most of the members in their frenzied excitement to the diggings, the pioneer society broke up.<sup>16</sup>

A similar fate, we are told, met a printers' association formed in 1851.<sup>17</sup> By the mid-1850s, however, alluvial pickings had dried up, and many diggers returned to their trades.<sup>18</sup> The Chartist, mason and one-time digger Charles Don subsequently became one of the most prominent radicals in Victoria, and a revitalised organisation of stonemasons led by Chartists such as James Stephens, James Galloway and Benjamin Douglas was instrumental in winning the eight-hour day in Victoria in 1856.<sup>19</sup> On the whole, however, the immense demographic, social and economic upheaval of these

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<sup>14</sup> *Northern Star*, 29 May 1841, p. 4; Jones, *Chartism and the Chartists*, pp. 86-7; Thompson, *The Chartists*, pp. 205-7.

<sup>15</sup> W.E. Murphy, *History of the eight hours movement* (Melbourne, 1896), p. 26.

<sup>16</sup> W.E. Murphy, *The history of capital and labour in all lands and ages: their past condition, present relations, and outlook for the future ...* (Sydney, 1888), p. 118.

<sup>17</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 156.

<sup>18</sup> Murphy, *History of the eight hours movement*, p. 39.

<sup>19</sup> For Don see D. Shiel, *The people's man: Charles Jardine Don, Australian labour's first parliamentarian* (North Melbourne, 1996). For organised labour see H. Hughes, 'The eight hour day and the development of the labour movement in Victoria in the eighteen-fifties', *Historical Studies* (Australia and New Zealand), 9 (1961), pp. 396-412.

years does make it difficult to trace Chartist politics via traditional interpretative foundations such as class.<sup>20</sup>

One alternative, and the basis of the approach pursued in this thesis, is to adopt a cultural approach to Chartism. At the outset I should stress that this course is not necessarily opposed to the class-oriented (or ‘Thompsonian’) interpretation of Chartism associated with Dorothy Thompson, Neville Kirk, Eileen Yeo, James Epstein and many other historians.<sup>21</sup> Unlike the postmodern historiography generally identified with the linguistic turn, this argument is not inspired by anti-humanist or anti-realist epistemological precepts. That said, any contemporary examination of Chartism must engage with many of the themes that have come to characterise the so-called ‘new political history’: the importance of language and rhetoric in determining political allegiance; the forms, technologies and aesthetics of demotic communication; the symbolic dimension of popular politics; and the use of class as an interpretative tool. Consequently, chapter one looks at the quite different ways a concept of ‘culture’ has been used in pertinent historiography over the past twenty years or so.

Most historians in any modern field would be at least vaguely aware that ‘language’ and ‘discourse’ have received considerable critical attention since Stedman Jones’ re-appraisal of Chartism appeared. Although rhetoric is also the starting point of my examination of Chartist political culture, perhaps the time has arrived for historians to move on from the long debate over language and class. Despite all that has now been written on these themes, we still have no satisfactory analysis of the

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<sup>20</sup> A general overview of economic and demographic themes can be found in W. Bate, *Victorian goldrushes* (Fitzroy, 1988).

<sup>21</sup> Thompson, *The Chartists*; N. Kirk, *The growth of working class reformism in mid-Victorian England* (London, 1985); E. Yeo, ‘Christianity in Chartist struggle’, *Past and Present*, 91 (1981), pp. 109-39; Epstein, *The lion of freedom: Feargus O’Connor and the Chartist movement, 1832-1842* (London, 1982).

eclectic spectrum of ideas and arguments that constituted Chartist rhetoric. And whilst a comprehensive discussion of this subject goes well beyond the scope of this thesis, chapter two does explore some of the most important elements of Chartist rhetoric in the British and Australian colonial contexts.

James Vernon, now one of the leading postmodern proponents of the linguistic turn, argues that constitutionalism was the ‘master narrative’ of English popular politics in the nineteenth century, and it is true that radical appropriations of the constitutional heritage informed much Chartist rhetoric.<sup>22</sup> As Vernon remarks, ‘Tory readings of the constitution emphasised the people’s *duty* to protect its Protestant libertarian nature, not, in radical readings, the *rights* they expected to flow from it’.<sup>23</sup> Yet the distinctive character of late-Chartist arguments, particularly those at odds with the ‘master narrative’, should not be forgotten. In particular, the republican and internationalist ideals of a new generation of radical activists inspired by the European revolutions of 1848 needs to be acknowledged, as does the final element of Chartist rhetoric so crucial to the colonial contexts discussed in section two – radical democratic ideas about the ownership, use and control of the land.

The land was the basis of Chartist political economy. Yet widespread debate in the 1840s and 1850s over the merits of allotment schemes, various forms of home colonisation, peasant proprietorship, emigration, land nationalisation, the cultivation of wastes, spade husbandry and so forth have not been reflected to a commensurate degree in the historiography of the movement. The Chartist Land Plan, one of the

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<sup>22</sup> J. Vernon, *Politics and the people: a study in English political culture, c. 1815-1867* (Cambridge, 1993), pp. 295-6. See also R.G. Hall, ‘Creating a people’s history: political identity and history in Chartism’ in O. Ashton, R. Fyson, and S. Roberts, eds., *The Chartist legacy* (Rendlesham, 1999), pp. 232-54.

<sup>23</sup> Vernon, *Politics and the people*, p. 300. Italics in original. J. Vernon, ‘Who’s afraid of the “linguistic turn”? The politics of social history and its discontents’, *Social History*, 19 (1994), p. 93.

most significant agrarian experiments undertaken in England in the nineteenth century, was only the most obvious manifestation of a whole range of radical ideas about the land.<sup>24</sup> As John Saville and Malcolm Chase have emphasised, the Plan was consistently disparaged by generations of radical historians who treated agrarianism as a ‘reactionary’ response to the industrial revolution.<sup>25</sup> Whilst the anachronistic tendencies of earlier Chartist historiography have now been exposed, Dorothy Thompson pointed out in 1984 that the Land Plan awaited its modern historian, a situation unchanged today.<sup>26</sup> And although a definitive account of the Plan is well beyond the scope of this argument, the highly publicised failure of the scheme did force some of the 70,000 members to look abroad to the United States and to the British colonies of settlement to fulfil their desire of an independent life on the land.

Relevant aspects of rhetoric having been examined in chapter two, chapter three discusses the unique relationship between oral and printed media in Chartist political culture. Here I take issue with Vernon’s argument that the gradual rise of printed forms of political communication in the nineteenth century led to a ‘closure’ of the constitution’s ‘libertarian’ potential.<sup>27</sup> I stress the liberating power of print, particularly the unprecedented rhetorical exhibition of working people participating in

<sup>24</sup> See generally J. MacAskill, ‘The Chartist Land Plan’ in A. Briggs, ed., *Chartist studies* (London, 1974), pp. 304-41; A.M. Hadfield, *The Chartist Land Company* (Newton Abbot, 1970); D. Hardy, *Alternative communities in nineteenth-century England* (London, 1979), pp. 83-105; M. Chase, “‘We Wish only to Work for Ourselves’: the Chartist Land Plan’ in M. Chase and I. Dyck, eds., *Living and learning: essays in honour of J.F.C. Harrison* (Aldershot, 1996), pp. 133-48; For a recent comparative analysis see also J. Bronstein, ‘Under their own vine and fig tree: land reform and working-class experience in Britain and America, 1830-1860’, (Ph.D. dissertation, Stanford University, 1996).

<sup>25</sup> For the older orthodoxy see M. Hovell, *The Chartist movement* (Manchester, 1963), pp. 267-84 and G.D.H. Cole, *Chartist portraits* (New York, 1965), pp. 324-36. Important re-evaluations include J. Saville, introduction to R.G. Gammage, *History of the Chartist movement, 1837-1854* (New York, 1969 rep.) and E. Yeo, ‘Some practices and problems of Chartist democracy’ in J. Epstein and D. Thompson, eds., *The Chartist experience: studies in working-class radicalism and culture, 1830-1860* (London, 1982), pp. 343-80.

<sup>26</sup> Thompson, *The Chartists*, p. 303.

<sup>27</sup> Vernon, *Politics and the people*, pp. 105-60 and *passim*.

national public dialogues on any number of contentious issues. The importance of the Chartist press (particularly the *Northern Star*, owned by Feargus O'Connor) in giving the movement a national identity has been stressed for some time now.<sup>28</sup> The significance of the mass platform, Chartist lecturing and missionary activity has also been recognised.<sup>29</sup> Yet the intimate relationship between the spoken and printed word needs to be explored in more detail, because this feature was one of the most distinctive features of Chartist political culture.<sup>30</sup> One good example of this cultural nexus was the production, distribution and institutionalised performance of Feargus O'Connor's open letter, usually published on the first page of the *Northern Star*. Patently the source of much of the criticism O'Connor has suffered down the years, these letters were effectively political scripts designed for oral performance at the grass-roots level. The weekly *communiqués* from centre to periphery also have considerable historiographical significance. For instance, O'Connor was long damned by historians who repeatedly wrenched his letters from their cultural context, judged them against the standards of high literacy, and found them wanting in consistency and sophistication. Chartist 'language' will remain an elusive quarry, however, until historians begin to consider the cultural tactics that were implemented to counter the potential impediments of poverty and illiteracy.

Accordingly, chapters four and five explore some of the links between the mass platform, the press, indoor and outdoor activities at the local level, and various symbolic media. Chartist meanings were mediated in a multitude of non-literal ways: colours, clothes, noise, music, fire – even silence was occasionally used to make a

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<sup>28</sup> J. Epstein, 'Feargus O'Connor and the *Northern Star*', *International Review of Social History*, 21 (1976), pp. 51-97; Thompson, *The Chartists*, ch. 2.

<sup>29</sup> Howell, "'Diffusing the light of liberty'"; Jones, *Chartism and the Chartists*, pp. 102-12.

<sup>30</sup> See, for example, Hovell, *The Chartist movement*, p. 71; J.F.C. Harrison, 'Chartism in Leeds' in A. Briggs, ed., *Chartist studies* (London, 1974), p. 74.

point, as occurred at Sheffield in September 1839.<sup>31</sup> Yet two contradictory elements of Chartist political culture also begin to emerge at this point. On one hand, a *contestatory* rationale lay behind the great mass-meetings, the urban marches and processions, the characteristic (and sometimes violent) invasions of opponents' forums. On the other hand, Chartists also expended considerable energies attempting to construct an *independent* or counter-cultural democratic world epitomised by the five Land Plan communities built between 1846 and 1849. This distinction between contestatory and counter-cultural practice was rarely clear-cut, but the dichotomy does bear directly upon the colonial dimension of the argument. Generally speaking, the counter-cultural emphases of the parent culture are not all that evident in Australia. To some extent, emigration was an expression of independence. Yet with a few notable exceptions (such as the radical Land Convention convened in Victoria in mid-1857) it was the ready-made, intimidatory and often improvised elements of the Chartist political inheritance which colonial radicals instinctively drew upon.

In 1986 Paul Pickering published an innovative article on the symbolic dimension of Chartist mass-communication.<sup>32</sup> This essay culminated in an intriguing vignette upon the meaning of Feargus O'Connor's ceremonial 'liberation' from York Castle gaol in August 1841 dressed in a suit of fustian. Such a clearly symbolic act by Chartism's famous gentleman leader, Pickering argues, amounted to a momentous gesture:

Fustian represented a new-found working-class consciousness in popular radicalism that had been forged in the bitter experiences of the 1830s ... The appearance of Feargus O'Connor, the most popular leader of Chartism, dressed as a

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<sup>31</sup> For the silent protests see *Northern Star*, 14 September 1839, p. 4; B. Moore, S. Holmes and J. Baxter, *Samuel Holberry – 1814-42: Sheffield's revolutionary democrat* (Sheffield, 1978), p. 12; Yeo, 'Christianity in Chartist struggle', p. 136.

<sup>32</sup> P. Pickering, 'Class without words: symbolic communication in the Chartist movement', *Past and Present*, 112 (1986), pp. 144-62.

working man was one of the most significant public declarations of the early 1840s: it was a statement of class without words.<sup>33</sup>

O'Connor's choice of fustian could be contrasted with the visual signature associated with Henry Hunt, his predecessor at the head of the radical 'mass platform'. Whereas 'Orator' Hunt's famous white top-hat 'could as easily befit a gentleman', O'Connor's 'dressing down' to fustian 'encapsulated the development of an exclusively working-class radicalism during the 1830s'.<sup>34</sup>

This argument effectively extended Edward Thompson's classic thesis of the development of a working-class consciousness in England to the symbolic realm of political contestation.<sup>35</sup> Not surprisingly, Pickering's argument has been dismissed by Patrick Joyce, now perhaps the leading critic of the 'Thompsonian' approach to class. 'Pickering's claim that the symbolism of O'Connor's fustian and his invocation of "blistered hands" and "unshorn chins" represent a new class awareness in his audience', Joyce writes in a footnote buried in *Visions of the people*, 'seems to me entirely unproven'.<sup>36</sup> Yet the York liberation deserves to be revisited, for it was just one element of a remarkably coherent quest narrative cultivated in various forms of political media around O'Connor's trial, fifteen-month imprisonment and his release. Chapter five thus consolidates a number of the themes discussed in preceding chapters, and places them within a specific historical context. As we shall see in chapter six, the exploration of the symbolic realm of political allegiance is particularly relevant when evaluating changing perceptions of Australia in Chartist rhetoric.

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<sup>33</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 162.

<sup>34</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 159-60.

<sup>35</sup> E.P. Thompson, *The making of the English working class* (Harmondsworth, 1991), ch. 16 and *passim*.

<sup>36</sup> P. Joyce, *Visions of the people: industrial England and the question of class, 1848-1914* (Cambridge, 1991), p. 408.

## II

The rationale of this thesis is to extend the study of Chartist political culture to various Australian colonial contexts during the post-1848 period. Such a necessarily limited focus, of course, does not exhaust the possibilities of following Chartism into Empire. In contrast to the thematic sweep of section one, the British foundation of the thesis, section two consists of a series of roughly chronological case-studies which examine the Chartist legacy, first in New South Wales and then Victoria. Again, I must stress that the concept of 'political culture' developed throughout section one and carried into section two is neither definitive nor exhaustive. On the contrary, the rationale guiding my approach has been to establish a suitable framework of reference from which to launch the Australian section of the argument.

Whilst 1848 should not be seen as the end of Chartism it was undoubtedly a watershed for the movement. Revolutionary hopes raised by events in Europe soon dissipated; in England the last Chartist national petition was treated with contempt by the state; then the Land Plan visibly began to disintegrate. As summer passed into autumn the threat of insurrection faded in England and Ireland, and once again Chartists were arrested, prosecuted, imprisoned and transported. For the committed radical, emigration beckoned as never before.

The first colonial gold-rushes, and particularly those in Victoria, have long been interpreted as an heroic phase of Australian history. The military attack upon miners encamped at the Eureka stockade at Ballarat in late 1854, for example, has been recounted many times in a various media.<sup>37</sup> The roughly attendant political shift

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<sup>37</sup> For examples of various kinds of historical narratives see R. Carboni, *The Eureka stockade* (Carlton, 1975 rep.); E. Lambert, *The five bright stars* (Melbourne, 1954); F.B. Smith, ed.,

towards responsible government in the 1850s is traced in any number of general texts upon colonial politics, Geoffrey Serle's *The golden age* (1963) being the classic narrative account for Victoria.<sup>38</sup> Some time ago Rob Pascoe argued that Serle should be categorised as a representative of the nationalist Australian 'old left', in company with more overtly radical historians such as Brian Fitzpatrick, Russel Ward and Robin Gollan.<sup>39</sup> Pascoe also argued, however, that the 'the central thrust of Serle's history is not to establish connections between social life and economic life; rather, his characteristic nexus is that between the social and political spheres'.<sup>40</sup> Despite Serle's sympathy for the digger, his treatment of the Chartist 'influence' in Victoria does not go very far. Writing of the red-ribbon activity on a number of central Victorian goldfields in 1853, for example, he argued that

the chartist influence is plain, if only in the mystique of the petition and the continual debate over 'moral' and 'physical' force, but no one, except Henry Holyoake, a brother of G.J. Holyoake, a leading chartist and freethinker, is known to have been formally connected with the movement.<sup>41</sup>

This passage sums up what might be termed the traditional approach to Chartism in Australia. Generally speaking, the Chartist 'influence' has been rather narrowly construed as the re-expression of the famous programme of parliamentary reform, or the identification of formal credentials amongst a few obscure antipodean 'agitators'.

Although Chartism has also become one of the staple contextual British 'backgrounds' in colonial political historiography, few Australian historians appear to

*Historical Studies: Eureka supplement* (Carlton, 1965); J. Molony, *Eureka* (Ringwood, 1989); B. O'Brien, *Massacre at Eureka: the untold story* (Kew, 1992). Harry Watt's Ealing film *Eureka stockade* (a.k.a. *Massacre Hill*) starring Chips Rafferty, Jane Barrett, Gordon Jackson and Peter Finch was made in 1948.

<sup>38</sup> G. Serle, *The golden age: a history of the colony of Victoria, 1851-1861* (Melbourne, 1977).

<sup>39</sup> R. Pascoe, *The manufacture of Australian history* (Melbourne, 1979), pp. 42-69. On the radical nationalists see also S. Macintyre, 'The making of the Australian working class: an historical survey', *Historical Studies*, 18 (1978), pp. 233-53.

<sup>40</sup> Pascoe, *The manufacture of Australian history*, p. 62.

<sup>41</sup> Serle, *The golden age*, p. 113.

have seriously engaged with the considerable literature which now exists on the movement.<sup>42</sup> On the contrary, the depiction of Chartism to be found even in current historiography often seems alarmingly reminiscent of the positivist clichés reluctantly crammed and regurgitated by generations of secondary students: those never-to-be remembered ‘six points’ of democratic parliamentary reform; the examiner’s favourite conundrum of ‘moral’ and ‘physical’ force; those other hardy themes such as the ‘hungry forties’ and the ‘fiasco’ of 10 April 1848 – that ‘year of revolutions’. Another common assumption is that Chartism could never have prospered in Australia because of the lack of significant forms of industrialisation. Was not Chartism *the* political symptom of industrial dislocation? Would it not be a curious phenomenon even in Sydney or Melbourne, let alone on the pastoral frontiers which mutated almost overnight into teeming, transient communities of goldseekers? As we shall see in the latter stages of section two, however, Chartism was arguably the single most important ‘influence’ upon Victorian democratic radicalism in the decade after 1848.

The external origins of a profoundly derivative colonial culture, and the way we might approach this problem, are matters which have not gone unremarked. For example, historians have sporadically debated the usefulness of Louis Hartz’s bold macro-comparative account of European colonialism, *The founding of new societies*, in which Australia is envisioned as the inheritor of the ‘radical’ fragment of European culture and ideology.<sup>43</sup> Broadly speaking, however, colonial historiography was until

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<sup>42</sup> Compare H.L. Harris, ‘The influence of Chartism in Australia’, *Journal of the Royal Australian Historical Society*, 11 (1926), pp. 351-79; R. Gollan, *Radical and working class politics: a study of eastern Australia 1850-1910* (Parkville, 1960), pp. 13-32; B. Fitzpatrick, *Short history of the Australian labor movement* (North Melbourne, 1968), pp. 81-9; Shiel, *The people’s man*; A. Oldfield, *The great republic of the south seas* (Alexandria, 1999). For New South Wales see also A. W. Martin, *Henry Parkes* (Carlton, 1980); J.B. Hirst, *The strange birth of colonial democracy: New South Wales, 1848-1884* (Sydney, 1988), pp. 2-5, 49.

<sup>43</sup> L. Hartz, *The founding of new societies* (New York, 1964); A.W. Martin, ‘Australia and the Hartz “fragment” thesis’, *Australian Economic History Review*, 13 (1973), pp. 131-47; G.C.

recently another profoundly domestic discipline in which obvious external ‘influences’ were constantly acknowledged, but never really examined in much depth. But as David Goodman stresses in his path-breaking comparative cultural history of responses to gold in Victoria and California, *Goldseeking* (1994), Australian historians need to reconsider their approach:

In reaction against the old order in which Australian history was taught simply as a footnote to imperial history, Australian historians turned to internal social history. But that social history makes sense only when placed within the context of a kind of historical anthropology of Englishness, of a study of the specificity and peculiarity of the dominant forms which were inherited from Britain.<sup>44</sup>

This awakening to the cultural heritage of a society of immigrants has obvious implications for the extended study of Chartism. Above all, Goodman looks backwards to the moral, aesthetic and political inheritances which informed responses to gold – especially the fears of change that have been forgotten in the heroic narratives of nation-building.

As a cultural historian Goodman’s concern with inherited form revolves primarily around language. Unlike earlier scholars who failed to look beyond the ‘six points’, Goodman examines the radical agrarian inheritance in some depth, particularly the way in which the land became construed as a source of certainty and social cohesion as alluvial gold deposits were exhausted.<sup>45</sup> Obviously aware of the ‘political’ re-direction in Chartist historiography over the past couple of decades, Goodman’s evocation of the persistence of English forms of moral and political understanding has explicitly been influenced by the general implications of Stedman Jones’ re-interpretation of Chartism. One of the features of Stedman Jones’ essays

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Bolton, ‘Louis Hartz’, *Australian Economic History Review*, 13 (1973), pp. 168-76; J.B. Hirst, ‘Keeping colonial history colonial: the Hartz thesis revisited’, *Historical Studies*, 21 (1984), pp. 85-104.

<sup>44</sup> D. Goodman, *Goldseeking: Victoria and California in the 1850s* (St Leonards, 1994), p. xiii.

<sup>45</sup> *Ibid.*, ch. 4.

(which will be discussed in more detail in the next chapter) was his stress upon the close rhetorical ties between Chartism and earlier forms of popular radical protest. Bypassing traditional materialist or ‘social’ explanations of Chartism’s rise and fall, he introduced a fresh perspective that acknowledges the historical tenacity of language or rhetoric. And if the popular radical tradition which culminated in Chartism was so durable in Britain, then it is not surprising that these arguments provided a ready vocabulary for colonial radicals well into the 1850s.<sup>46</sup>

Goodman’s imaginative extension of Stedman Jones’ revisionism, however, is also a little problematic. Stedman Jones argues that the traditional language of radical reform finally lost its power to convince in the early 1840s. On this reading Chartist rhetoric was in decay a decade before the goldrushes, a point Goodman fails to address in his application of the continuity of ideology argument. Stedman Jones has little to say, moreover, about the evolution of Chartist culture during the 1840s, or its persistence in London and some industrial communities well into the 1850s.<sup>47</sup> Margot Finn has since stressed that ‘if historians gifted with hindsight see in late Chartism a beleaguered, riven and insular agitation, contemporaries were united in the belief that the English and continental radical movements were of a revolutionary piece in 1848’.<sup>48</sup> Although the movement never regained the resurgence of mass-support it enjoyed in 1847-8, the traditional picture of its ‘collapse’ in April 1848 has been

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<sup>46</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 120-1.

<sup>47</sup> M. Finn, *After Chartism: class and nation in English radical politics, 1848-1874* (Cambridge, 1993); A. Taylor, ‘Modes of political expression and working-class radicalism, 1848-1874: the London and Manchester examples’ (Ph.D. thesis, University of Manchester, 1992); M. Taylor, *The decline of British radicalism* (Oxford, 1995), pp. 99-123. For a local perspective see K. Tiller, ‘Late Chartism: Halifax 1847-58’ in J. Epstein and D. Thompson, eds., *The Chartist experience: studies in working-class radicalism and culture, 1830-60* (London, 1982), pp. 311-44.

<sup>48</sup> Finn, *After Chartism*, pp. 62-3. See also H. Weisser, *British working-class movements and Europe, 1815-1848* (Manchester, 1975), especially ch. 4.

refined somewhat of late. Finn, Gregory Claeys and other historians have stressed the widespread internationalist empathy that characterised late Chartist endeavour, culminating in the remarkable adulation heaped upon Lajos Kossuth, the Hungarian revolutionary hero, after his arrival in England in late 1851.<sup>49</sup> William Dexter, the bohemian Chartist who later designed the digger flag used at Bendigo, was said to have cut a striking figure in London at this time attired in an ‘Hungarian costume’.<sup>50</sup> Henry Nicholls, who also emigrated to Victoria, recalled in his memoirs how the ‘last thing almost I did in England was to become a member of the Kossuth demonstration committee’ which organised the immense public welcome held at the Copenhagen Fields in London.<sup>51</sup> Although a rather diverse body (‘men of all sorts and conditions’, as Nicholls put it) the committee was obliged to draw upon Chartism’s still considerable capacity to take control of the streets in the post-1848 period.<sup>52</sup>

As Finn and Claeys have also stressed, various forms of revolutionary republicanism went hand in hand with the internationalist ethos of late Chartism.<sup>53</sup> Henry Holyoake, William Dexter, Henry Nicholls and other recent arrivals who found themselves organising digger protests in Victoria were immersed in an eclectic ‘*democ-soc*’ political culture. ‘In politics we declared for a “Red Republic”’, Nicholls remembered of the Chelsea locality to which he belonged in the early 1850s, and perhaps the Lieutenant-Governor of Victoria, Charles La Trobe, did not exaggerate

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<sup>49</sup> Finn, *After Chartism*; G. Claeys, ‘Mazzini, Kossuth and British radicalism, 1848-1854’, *Journal of British Studies*, 28 (1989), pp. 225-61; Taylor, ‘Modes of political expression’, pp. 59-62.

<sup>50</sup> J. Haslem, *The old Derby china factory: the workmen and their productions* (Wakefield, 1973 rep.), pp. 139-41.

<sup>51</sup> H.R. Nicholls, Typescript memoirs of London Chartism, Dixson Collection, State Library of New South Wales, p. 23. Nicholls’ MS. diary of his voyage to Victoria is also held in the Dixson collection.

<sup>52</sup> See Claeys, ‘Mazzini, Kossuth’, pp. 244-9; Taylor, ‘Modes of political expression’, pp. 59-62; Pickering, ‘“Glimpses of Eternal Truth”’, pp. 64-5.

<sup>53</sup> Claeys, ‘Mazzini, Kossuth’; Finn, *After Chartism*, chs. 2-3.

much when he informed the Secretary of State in 1853 that ‘Thousands are flocking to these shores whose whole prepossession is anti-monarchical’.<sup>54</sup> Chartist republicanism is a complex subject, and will be dealt with in more detail in chapter two. That said, there is still a tendency to see its flowering during 1848 as little more than a literary conceit amongst leaders with close *émigré* connections such as Julian Harney or W.J. Linton.<sup>55</sup> Certainly, other republicans who came to national prominence in Britain at this point such as Joseph Barker or G.W.M. Reynolds have only received belated attention from historians.<sup>56</sup>

The final complication of late Chartist identity relevant to the Australian context is the widespread participation of Irish immigrants in the movement, and particularly the precedent of intimate organisational ties between militant Chartists and Mitchelite Confederates in London, the West Riding, Manchester, its satellite towns and Liverpool during 1848.<sup>57</sup> All these comparatively unheralded features of late Chartist political culture need to be transposed to the colonial context, as they help explain a number of issues which Australian historians have failed to broach, let alone answer. For example, why did constitutionalist and republican radicals cooperate so closely in the antipodes? How was it that European immigrants were so

<sup>54</sup> Nicholls, Typescript memoir of London Chartism, p. 1; Serle, *The golden age*, p. 113.

<sup>55</sup> See, for example, F.C. Mather, *Chartism and society: an anthology of documents* (London, 1980), p. 23. For Harney see A.R. Schoyen, *The Chartist challenge: a portrait of George Julian Harney* (London, 1958). For Linton see F.B. Smith, *Radical artisan: William James Linton, 1812-97* (Manchester, 1973).

<sup>56</sup> On Reynolds see R. McWilliam, ‘The mysteries of G.W.M. Reynolds: radicalism and melodrama in Victorian Britain’ in M. Chase and I. Dyck, eds., *Living and learning: essays in honour of J.F.C. Harrison* (Aldershot, 1996), pp. 182-98. For Barker see M. Brook, ‘Joseph Barker and the *People*, the true emigrant’s guide’, *Publications of the Thoresby Society*, 46 (1961), pp. 331-78; S. Roberts, ‘Joseph Barker and the radical cause, 1848-51’, *Publications of the Thoresby Society* (second series), 1 (1990), pp. 59-73.

<sup>57</sup> See D. Thompson, ‘Ireland and the Irish in English radicalism before 1850’ in J. Epstein and D. Thompson, eds., *The Chartist experience: studies in working-class radicalism and culture, 1830-60* (London, 1982), pp. 120-51; W. J. Lowe, ‘The Chartists and the Irish confederates: Lancashire, 1848’, *Irish Historical Studies*, 24 (1984), pp. 172-96; G. Davis, *The Irish in Britain, 1815-1914* (Dublin, 1991), ch. 5; J. Belchem, ‘Nationalism, republicanism and exile: Irish immigrants and the revolutions of 1848’, *Past and Present*, 146 (1995), pp. 103-35.

readily welcomed into the colonial radical movements? What organisational antecedents led to English and Irish diggers uniting in arms, most famously at the Eureka stockade in 1854, but also at Bendigo the year before? Ideology is, no doubt, as ‘durable’ as Stedman Jones and Goodman stress. One of the fundamental questions raised by colonial popular radicalism, however, is which Chartist ideologies maintained a vital currency in the new world?

### III

Accordingly, the second section of this thesis explores some of the more significant manifestations of Chartist political culture in the Australian colonies. Chapter six introduces this interpretative shift by looking at changing perceptions about Australia within the parent culture. In 1981 Alan Beever published an article on the transformation of working-class attitudes to Australia between 1841 and 1851.<sup>58</sup> Beever’s study, which draws largely upon the *Northern Star* and the near-Chartist *Lloyds Weekly London Newspaper*, shows how the content of journalistic notice changed from ‘virtual contempt to enormous enthusiasm’ by the time of the first Australian goldrushes in 1851.<sup>59</sup> This thesis of change is difficult to dispute for what it says about attitudes in general. But Beever arguably underestimates the almost continual opposition of influential Chartist opinion-makers to the whole question of emigration well into the 1850s.

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<sup>58</sup> A. Beever, ‘From a place of horrible destitution to a paradise of the working class. The transformation of British working class attitudes to Australia, 1841-1851’, *Labour History*, 40 (1981), pp. 1-15.

<sup>59</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 1.

During the 1830s the Australian colonies were largely synonymous with political exile, tyranny, corruption and evil. The Chartist experience of transportation, moreover, was well-suited to rhetorical mobilisation within the popular romance narrative form analysed in chapter five – now the ‘Whig dungeon’, the archetypal symbol of domestic oppression, became a kind of ante-chamber which the persecuted patriot had to negotiate while descending to an even more terrible netherworld.<sup>60</sup> ‘We are come to the wrong end of the world’ were George Loveless’ terse words as he approached Hobart aboard the *William Metcalfe* in late 1834.<sup>61</sup> Seven years later the editor of the *English Chartist Circular* exhorted his readers to ‘rest not, pause not until you have rescued *Frost, Williams, and Jones*, from the land of Law-made *Demons*’.<sup>62</sup> The subsequent activity carried on at the local level for some fifteen years to secure the return from Van Diemen’s Land of the leaders of the Newport rising itself points to the motivational power of unresolved political quests.<sup>63</sup> In fact, Frost’s national tour undertaken after his return to England in 1856 was arguably the last Chartist mass-mobilisation in Britain.

From about the mid-1840s, however, some more positive estimations of Australia began to appear in Chartist literature. This change, no doubt, reflected important shifts made in penal and emigration policy during the late 1830s.<sup>64</sup>

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<sup>60</sup> For Chartist convicts generally see G. Rudé, *Protest and punishment: the story of the social and political prisoners transported to Australia, 1788-1868* (Oxford, 1978).

<sup>61</sup> G. Loveless, *The victims of Whiggery ...* (London, 1969 rep.), p. 11.

<sup>62</sup> *English Chartist Circular*, 2 (1842-3), p. 95. Italics in original.

<sup>63</sup> On the Newport rising see D. Jones, *The last rising: the Newport insurrection of 1839* (Oxford, 1985). See also D. Williams, *John Frost: a study in Chartism* (London, 1969). For a bibliography of other material on the insurrection see J. Warner and W.A. Gunn, *John Frost and the Chartist movement in Monmouthshire* (Newport, 1939).

<sup>64</sup> For a demographic overview see W.D. Borrie, *The European peopling of Australasia: a demographic history, 1788-1988* (Canberra, 1994), chs. 2-4; The classic works on transportation are L.L. Robson, *The convict settlers of Australia: an enquiry into the origin and character of the convicts transported to New South Wales and Van Diemen’s Land, 1787-1852* (Melbourne, 1965) and A.G.L. Shaw, *Convicts and the colonies: a study of penal*

Transportation to New South Wales, for example, effectively ceased by 1840, and Victoria (which became independent from New South Wales in 1851) was never a penal colony. But emigration itself remained a hotly contested subject into the 1850s. Many democrats continued to equate state-assisted emigration of the poor with ‘wholesale transportation’, and in the late 1840s ‘Malthusian’ ‘emigration mongers’ were castigated by a new breed of Chartist journalists such as G.W.M. Reynolds and Ernest Jones. Jones, Reynolds and Feargus O’Connor all equated the decision to emigrate with political quietism. For most democratic leaders the opportunities popularly associated with emigration could be more constructively pursued in Britain, and tens of thousands enrolled in the O’Connorite vision of home colonisation in the mid-to-late 1840s. Following the collapse of the Land Plan, Jones insisted that the implementation of a new proto-socialist policy of land nationalisation would render emigration obsolete.<sup>65</sup> As we shall see in chapter six, even as the first goldrushes in New South Wales and Victoria were beginning to gain momentum in 1851, Jones continued to propagate a demonic vision of Australia, seemingly in a futile attempt to arrest a burgeoning exodus.

Despite Jones’ extravagant depictions of cannibal convicts, pestilence and impending disaster, a significant trade in radical political culture already existed between Britain and colonial Australia. These links, hitherto neglected by historians, are perhaps most obvious in the pages of the *People’s Advocate*, a neo-Chartist newspaper published in Sydney by Edward Hawksley from 1848 to 1856, and the subject of chapter seven.<sup>66</sup> Marion Diamond has recently suggested that Hawksley,

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*transportation from Great Britain and Ireland to Australia and other parts of the British empire* (London, 1966).

<sup>65</sup> For Jones see J. Saville, *Ernest Jones, Chartist* (London, 1952).

<sup>66</sup> For Hawksley see J.M. O’Brien, ‘Edward John Hawksley’, *Journal of the Australian Catholic Historical Society*, 3 (1971), pp. 32-45; M. Diamond, ‘Edward Hawksley: a Catholic and

although a rather marginal figure in colonial historiography, actually ‘developed the most intellectually rigorous defence of democracy yet to appear in Australia’.<sup>67</sup> Despite this belated recognition, Hawksley’s explicit Chartist allegiance in New South Wales remains inadequately appraised. Not only did he reprint Chartist journalism, rhetoric and poetry in the pages of the *People’s Advocate*. Prominent radical leaders in Britain such as Feargus O’Connor and Julian Harney were aware of Hawksley’s venture in Sydney, and copy from the *People’s Advocate* can also be found in Chartist papers such as the *Northern Star* and Harney’s *Democratic Review*. Printed communication was not just a conduit from the centre to the periphery of Empire. Rather, it was a dialogic medium that enabled democrats such as Hawksley to contribute to Chartist political culture from afar. Hawksley (who hailed from Nottingham) also attempted to implement elements of the counter-cultural repertoire in Sydney, including a version of the Land Plan and a scheme to build a democratic ‘People’s Hall’. But as we shall see, these endeavours appear to have provoked little interest amongst his readership.

The final two chapters of this thesis examine the importance of the Chartist inheritance in the new colony of Victoria, which until independence in 1851 had been New South Wales’ southern pastoral frontier. During the subsequent goldrushes Victoria was transformed by new forms of capital accumulation and a spectacular phase of mass-emigration which saw the population increase approximately sevenfold by the end of the decade. Rather than revisiting the most famous episode of goldfields conflict, the military attack made upon predominantly Irish diggers at the Eureka

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radical’ in D. Cryle, ed., *Disreputable profession: journalists and journalism in colonial Australia* (Rockhampton, 1997), pp. 41-54. More generally see R.B. Walker, *The newspaper press in New South Wales, 1803-1920* (Sydney, 1976).

<sup>67</sup>

Diamond, ‘Edward Hawksley’, p. 52.

stockade, chapter eight reconsiders the ‘red-ribbon’ demonstrations on a number of central Victorian goldfields (particularly Bendigo) during the previous year.<sup>68</sup> This episode has attracted comparatively little attention from historians, but it highlights some of the problems of the dated historiography which still informs much our understanding of popular radicalism during the goldrushes.

I will argue that the main flaw of existing interpretation is its tendency to link fervently espoused political sentiment to localised economic factors. The problems of this kind of commonsensical materialism are, in fact, remarkably similar to those which affected Chartist historiography in Britain until the 1960s. Consider briefly the treatment of the unifying object of goldfields protest, the thirty-shilling monthly license required to mine and reside on a field. Geoffrey Blainey remarked in 1963 that ‘Millions of words have been written on the effects of the gold license but not many on its origins’.<sup>69</sup> The same was, and is, true of the political origins of the license grievance. It was abhorred because it was perceived, rightly or wrongly, as an unjust *tax* levied upon the politically excluded producers of colonial wealth. Miles Taylor has stressed the importance of this kind of argument in Chartist rhetoric, and his point that taxation ‘was political in its origins, and economic in its effects’ desperately needs to be extended to the colonial context.<sup>70</sup> Despite the saturation of red-ribbon protest with Chartist rhetoric, symbols and organisational forms, the miners invariably emerge from existing historiography as apolitical agents whose aims were, to use

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<sup>68</sup> The most detailed accounts of red-ribbon protest are B. Kent, ‘Agitations on the Victorian gold fields, 1851-1854: an interpretation’ in F.B. Smith, ed., *Historical Studies: Eureka Supplement*, (Melbourne, 1965), pp. 1-18; Serle, *The golden age*, pp. 107-18; F. Cusack, *Bendigo: a history* (Melbourne, 1973), pp. 77-97; P. Morgan, *Folie à deux: William and Caroline Dexter in Australia* (Quakers Hill, 1999), ch. 3.

<sup>69</sup> G. Blainey ‘The gold rushes: the year of decision’, *Historical Studies* (Australia and New Zealand), 10 (1962), p. 136.

<sup>70</sup> Taylor, ‘Rethinking the Chartists’, p. 488.

Bruce Kent's phrase, 'avowedly economic'.<sup>71</sup> My approach, on the other hand, stresses the political essence of the protest.

If visions of riches did lure hundreds of thousands of emigrants to Victoria in the 1850s, in disappointment they soon turned their attentions elsewhere. The final chapter of the thesis discusses the neo-Chartist Land Convention which sat in Melbourne during July and August 1857, the year after a comparatively democratic bicameral system of responsible government was introduced in Victoria. Again, it is remarkable that this anti-parliament has received so little attention from Australian historians. Specifically convened to oppose Crown Land legislation proposed by the second Haines ministry, the Convention advocated the implementation of the remaining Chartist programme of democratic political reform, the abolition of existing tenure enjoyed by pastoralist lessees ('squatters') and the introduction of free selection of unalienated Crown Land before survey. Although the infant Victorian Legislative Assembly (or lower house) was elected on nominally democratic principles (including the ballot), the unequal distribution of parliamentary seats, a complex registration system and a system of plural voting diluted its representative capacity.<sup>72</sup> An elitist domination of the Legislative Council (or upper house) was virtually guaranteed by a £100 voter and a £5,000 membership qualification.<sup>73</sup> Just like its Chartist forbears, the Land Convention was presented as the true or legitimate expression of 'the People's' will.

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<sup>71</sup> Kent, 'Agitations', p. 24; Serle, *The golden age*, p. 113.

<sup>72</sup> For the introduction of the ballot generally see G. Quaife, 'The victory of the ballot in 1856', *Victorian Historical Magazine*, 38 (1967), pp. 144-58 and R.S. Neale, 'H.S. Chapman and the "Victorian" ballot', *Historical Studies*, 12 (1967), pp. 506-21.

<sup>73</sup> A chronology of parliamentary qualifications can be found in K. Thomson and G. Serle, eds., *A biographical register of the Victorian parliament, 1859-1900* (Canberra, 1972), appendix 2.

As had been the case at Bendigo, a number of Chartists (including George Thomson, J.B. Crews, Charles Don and James Galloway) were prominent among the Conventionists who represented over 30 urban, mining and rural districts. The organisational machinery that underpinned the Convention was also taken straight from the Chartist textbook. Yet we need to look beyond the forum itself to appreciate the persistence of Chartist political culture in the late 1850s as Victoria lurched from one political crisis to another. A number of militant political associations sprang up around the Convention, and in 1857-8 mass-meetings were regularly held in Melbourne's Eastern Market, where orators harangued boisterous assemblies from makeshift platforms.<sup>74</sup> As I will show in some detail, these urban demonstrations were imbued with many of the intimidatory protocols which had characterised Chartist protest in Britain.

This thesis thus makes a case that neo-Chartist rhetoric, symbols, organisational forms and media flourished in Victoria during the 1850s. Somewhat paradoxically, the Chartist 'influence' actually seems to have grown stronger as the decade progressed. Yet all the colonial contexts chosen for discussion raise new and difficult questions about the ultimate temper of Chartist political culture. John Belchem has remarked upon the 'inclusive character of platform agitation' in Britain, and the way in which Chartism was committed to 'members unlimited'.<sup>75</sup> Edward Hawksley may have implicitly embraced former convicts (who were still a large part of the colonial community) in his definition of 'the People' as the working classes, but he plainly rejected non-European peoples. Women, too, appear to have been considered as essentially apolitical agents. In Victoria, where Chinese miners briefly

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<sup>74</sup> Serle, *The golden age*, pp. 274-5.

<sup>75</sup> J. Belchem, *Popular radicalism in nineteenth-century Britain* (Basingstoke, 1996), p. 80.

accounted for about 20% of the adult male population in the late 1850s, racial exclusion became something of an obsession amongst radical democrats. As early as 1854 digger leaders had attempted to incite Europeans forcibly to expel Chinese miners from the Bendigo fields, a call echoed by the Land Convention in the immediate aftermath of the murderous Buckland River riots.<sup>76</sup> The whole radical campaign to ‘unlock the land’, moreover, was implicitly predicated upon the classic ideological justification of indigenous dispossession – *terra nullius*.<sup>77</sup> Whilst Chartist political culture thrived in Victoria, its inclusive tendencies appear to have collapsed when confronted by the existence of profoundly dissimilar cultures at the colonial frontier.

However, this issue was just one element of a rich political legacy. Emigration was a significant element of the late-Chartist experience, and the international ramifications of the movement should no longer be ignored. Nor can Australian scholars continue to reiterate positivist clichés when discussing the Chartist ‘influence’ in Australia. Rather, historians need to consider the notion that Chartist culture spiralled to the ends of Empire just as it was supposed to have succumbed to an undignified death in Britain. Certainly, a comprehensive understanding of the first modern mass-movement demands that we follow the alternatives available to committed democrats in the wake of the repeated political disappointments of the 1840s. We need to look at the stock of political arguments working-class emigrants

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<sup>76</sup> Serle, *The golden age*, p. 271; For the Chinese experience see A. Markus, *Fear and hatred: purifying Australia and California, 1850-1901* (Sydney, 1979), ch. 2; J. Gittins, *The diggers from China: the story of Chinese on the goldfields* (Melbourne, 1981); K. Cronin, *Colonial casualties: Chinese in early Australia* (Melbourne, 1982), chs. 2-3; E. Rolls, *Sojourners: the epic story of China's centuries-old relationship with Australia* (St Lucia, 1992).

<sup>77</sup> For divergent approaches to this issue see A. Frost, ‘New South Wales as a *terra nullius*: the British denial of land rights’, *Historical Studies*, 19 (1981), pp. 513-23; H. Reynolds, *The law of the land* (Ringwood, 1987).

instinctively turned to in Australia, the organisational and media forms they remembered and re-deployed, and the symbolic protocols and meanings that they shared. Chartist emigrants such as Henry Holyoake, Henry Nicholls, William Dexter and Charles Don may have abandoned their birthplace, their adopted community, their trades and even their families in the pursuit of gold. What they evidently held on to during this litany of displacement was the quasi-religious fervour that typified active Chartist allegiance.<sup>78</sup>

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<sup>78</sup> Don's first wife died whilst he was on the goldfields. See Shiel, *The people's man*, p. 27. For wife desertion in this context see C. Twomey, "'Without natural protectors': responses to wife desertion in gold-rush Australia", *Australian Historical Studies*, 28 (1997), pp. 22-46.