

Why did chartism fail



**ASSIGN
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The question why Chartism failed and why it was so quickly has never been answered to a satisfactory level. If Chartism was a reaction to hunger and to the disorganisation of traditional industries then the good economic climate which followed the Great Exhibition of 1851, the increase in stability of Britain's industries in this period and the organisation in which new industrial workforce was allowed to develop is enough to say why Chartism declined and died. The 'hunger Chartism' was the rational movement moved into the organisation of consumer cooperatives, new model trade unions, reading-rooms, mechanics' institutes, local government, friendly societies and other organisations which skilled workers developed at the end of the nineteenth century. This implies to some extent a betrayal by the skilled and frequently employed of the ambitions of the less fortunate associate. This could mean that the idea of 'a conscious move by the employing class to divide the skilled workers from the rest'. The Chartist period shows a conflict between the 'hegemonic middle class and the traditional culture of the British working class'. This conflict is only seen by the end of Chartism and by the inclusion of articulate members of the working class into the traditions and values of the middle class. (Thompson p. 330) In the 1860s when parliamentary reform was looked at again under the leadership of the Reform League many of the old Chartist leaders e. g. George Webber, Halifax weaver, John Skelton, Matthew John, Moses Simpson of Hanley, surfaced to take up the lead in local reform initiatives. These men had never given up the idea of political reform. The idea that militant Chartism had been defeated by the attitudes and values of the middle class is very oversimplified. It is wrong to imply that a working class which spent a quarter of the century building up the trade unions, societies and cooperative stores in the hostility of employers,

shopkeepers and the bourgeois press had been defeated by bourgeois ideology. (Thompson p. 332) One difficulty with a cross-class alliance made the Charter's objectives more vulnerable to pressure from other preoccupations of the middle class. This affected the question of repeal of the Corn Laws. This issue had significant meaning in south east Lancashire where confident factories and commercial bourgeoisie stood uncompromisingly for repeal but also saw a solution for their workforces demanding wage increases to meet the price of bread. Working Class Chartists were doubtful of these motivations and saw antagonistic employers. The Manchester Guardian, which spoke for the free trade interest was antagonistic of the Chartists. However, according to the Anti-Corn Law League meetings were interrupted by Chartist hecklers. There was little hope of a partnership but a sympathetic understanding did develop and Peel's Corn Law Repeal in 1846 was approved by most Chartist spokesmen. (Charlton p. 52)