

D. J. ROWE

## SOME ASPECTS OF CHARTISM ON TYNESIDE

In the decade since the publication of *Chartist Studies*<sup>1</sup> there have been published a considerable number of studies of Chartism in different towns and regions of the country. These have been of great use in the correction of generalization in our knowledge of the subject; in assessing the type of support for Chartism and the regional strength of that support; in showing the local factors which caused people to join the movement and assessing the relative importance of economic and political motives; and many other aspects which have deepened our knowledge. In this flow of studies the north east has been neglected, situated as it is between the importance of Chartism in Lancashire and Yorkshire (in Chartist literature invariably referred to as the north) and the equally interesting moderation of Scottish Chartism. As a result there has been only one article on Chartism in the region, by W. H. Maehl,<sup>2</sup> which, although it contains much useful information on 1839, tends to exaggerate the significance of Chartism in the area and the extent to which the pitmen were active in the movement. This article is an attempt to look at further evidence in order to draw some new conclusions with regard to Chartism in the area.

Some accounts of Chartism commence with a fully-fledged movement in the summer of 1838, when large crowds turned out in many towns, including Sunderland and Newcastle upon Tyne, to support the *People's Charter* and the National Petition but this is clearly question begging. As any one who has ever tried to obtain support for a reform or a demonstration will realise, crowds just do not flock to support from altruistic motives. There has to be considerable pent-up feeling, or else some previous organisation on which the new agitation may be based. A number of background factors to the Chartist movement have been postulated by historians and some of these may be of significance with regard to the north east. Distrust of the middle classes, after the

<sup>1</sup> A. Briggs (ed.), *Chartist Studies* (1959).

<sup>2</sup> W. H. Maehl, "Chartist disturbances in Northeastern England, 1839", in: *International Review of Social History*, VIII, 3 (1963).

failure of the 1832 Reform Act to bring about an improvement in working-class conditions, has been one suggestion. This presupposes both middle- and working-class consciousnesses, which seems unlikely at such an early period and there is certainly little evidence in the north east at this time of the build-up of such a feeling, which might have led the working classes into Chartism. Secondly one might postulate the importance of earlier radical organisation on which Chartism might build. In the case of the north east there had been a strong reform movement in 1832, headed by the Northern Political Union, which was reorganised in 1838, although most of the earlier radicalism had come from the merchant and manufacturing classes. A further aspect of the north east was that in the *Northern Liberator*, Newcastle was one of the few towns in the country which possessed an advanced radical newspaper. The *Liberator*, first published in October 1837 by A. H. Beaumont,<sup>1</sup> considered that its task was the maintaining of "pure democracy in the North of England". Its readership was largely within the region and it is clear that it had some effect in encouraging the development of radical activity.

The *Liberator* was initially responsible for fostering a local campaign against the introduction of the New Poor Law and it has often been suggested that this agitation was one of the elements which led into Chartism, especially in the north of England. It should be said that the agitation against the New Poor Law was based on fear of what that law might mean for the poor rather than on any evidence that it would mean a deterioration in conditions. A recent study of the introduction of the New Poor Law in the Tyneside area<sup>2</sup> makes it clear that it was implemented after considerable thought and with great care and that under it there was a certain amount of genuine concern for the condition of the poor. It is, however, clear that there was a certain amount of opposition to the change in the region and that it was connected with people who subsequently became Chartists. On 1 January 1838 a meeting was held at Newcastle to demand the repeal of the New Poor Law, at which J. R. Stephens made one of his famous wild speeches. He told the crowd

"And if this damnable law, which violated all the laws of God, was continued, and all means of peaceably putting an end to it had been made in vain, then, in the words of their banner, 'For

<sup>1</sup> See the *Northern Liberator*, 21 Oct. 1837, and W. H. Maehl, "Augustus Hardin Beaumont: Anglo-American Radical (1798-1838)", in: *International Review of Social History*, XIV, 2 (1969).

<sup>2</sup> N. McCord, "The Implementation of the 1834 Poor Law Amendment Act on Tyneside", in: *International Review of Social History*, XIV, 1 (1969).

children and wife we'll war to the knife'. If the people who produced all wealth could not be allowed, according to God's Word, to have the kindly fruits of the earth which they had, in obedience to God's Word, raised by the sweat of their brow, then war to the knife with their enemies, who were the enemies of God. If the musket and the pistol, the sword, and the pike were of no avail, let the women take the scissors, the child the pin or needle. If all failed, then the firebrand – aye, the firebrand – the firebrand, I repeat. The palace shall be in flames. I pause, my friends. If the cottage is not permitted to be the abode of man and wife, and if the smiling infant is to be dragged from a father's arms and a mother's bosom, it is because these hell-hounds of commissioners have set up the command of their master the devil, against our God."<sup>1</sup>

This speech was well received by the crowd which gave Stephens considerable applause, and O'Connor, who was at the meeting, clearly saw that there was sufficient opposition to the New Poor Law in the region for him to revert to the subject at a subsequent Chartist meeting in Newcastle. On 28 June 1838, at a meeting to adopt the National Petition, O'Connor said

"Harry Brougham said they wanted no poor law as every young man ought to lay up a provision for old age, yet, while he said this with one side of his mouth, he was screwing the other side to get his retiring pension raised from £4,000 to £5,000 a year. But if the people had their rights they would not long pay his salary. Harry would go to the treasury, he would knock, but Cerberus would not open the door, he would ask, 'Who is there?' and then luckless Harry would answer, 'It's an ex-chancellor coming for his £1,250, a quarter's salary'; but Cerberus would say, 'There have been a dozen of ye here today already, and there is nothing for ye', then Harry would cry, 'Oh! what will become of me! what shall I do!' and Cerberus would say, 'Go into the Bastile that you have provided for the people'. Then when Lord Harry and Lady Harry went into the Bastile, the keeper would say, 'This is your ward to the right, and this, my lady, is your ward to the left; we are Malthusians here, and are afraid you would breed, therefore you must be kept asunder'. "<sup>2</sup>

Inevitably such comments received a welcome from the crowd, which, together with the existence of an anti-poor law association in

<sup>1</sup> Quoted in M. Hovell, *The Chartist Movement* (Manchester, 1918), p. 97.

<sup>2</sup> Quoted in R. G. Gammage, *History of the Chartist Movement, 1837-1854* (rev. ed., Newcastle upon Tyne, 1894), p. 26.

Newcastle, suggests that this agitation was a factor in providing the incipient Chartist movement with support. Since the opposition to the New Poor Law was slight in the area, the extent of this support could not have been considerable. The reaction of the “respectable” classes to the anti-poor law agitation may be suggested by a letter from James Scott, overseer of the poor of the parish of St Nicholas, Newcastle, to Lord John Russell, the Home Secretary. Scott wrote

“I can assure your lordship that the enquiry is now general here whether Stephens has a licence for preaching *Rebellion* and *Murder* or if not how happens it that Lord John Russell allows a *scoundrel* like this to go round the countryside misleading the ignorant and persuading the working classes to take up arms against the Government?

We in this district are a quiet and orderly set of people [...] we do not complain of the New Poor Law – the poor do not complain of it – I can bear testimony to the fact that the Guardians are more humane and liberal to the poor than the Select Vestry were.

We were going on as well as possible with the New Law, no one saying a word against it, [when A. H. Beaumont] a vagabond from London [started the *Northern Liberator* which has become the] headquarters for all the scum of the district.”<sup>1</sup>

Although Scott’s position on the New Poor Law is clearly a very committed one, it was much more representative of the majority opinion within any or all classes within the region than was that of Stephens.

Finally, it is frequently suggested that economic distress was a major factor which encouraged the development of Chartism. In the country as a whole the years from 1837 to 1842 were ones of considerable depression with heavy unemployment but in the north east the years from 1837 to 1840 were fairly prosperous and depression was much less serious in 1841 and 1842 than it was in most other industrial areas of the country. The north east was dependent on expanding industries such as coal and shipbuilding and had no major declining domestic industries. Between 1830 and 1844 the number of Tyneside collieries increased from 37 to 70 and the period from 1836 to 1843 saw especially heavy capital investment in the opening of coal mines in other parts of the region. In addition the shipbuilding industry was expanding rapidly and railway building was providing much direct employment as

<sup>1</sup> Public Record Office, Home Office Papers, 40/39, dated 5 Jan. 1838. The Home Office Papers are the source of many of the references in this article. In order to avoid over-loading it with foot-notes such references are unacknowledged. The main categories are HO 40/42 and 40/46.

well as indirectly through the expansion of the iron industry and the metal producing trades. Contemporary accounts allow of no other conclusion than that wages were generally good as compared with other parts of the country and no doubt this was due to the fact that the rapid rate of industrial development of the region in the previous decade had led to a shortage of labour which had caused the bidding up of wages and was causing heavy immigration.<sup>1</sup> Early in 1839 William Thomason, a local Chartist, wrote to Dr John Taylor, one of Newcastle's delegates to the Chartist National Convention, in answer to his queries with regard to local wages. According to him there were on Tyneside 1,600 keelmen earning 14/- a week, 1,000 smiths earning 21/-, 500 joiners at 18/-, 16,000 pitmen on Tyne and Wear at 13/- to 15/-, 12,000 shipwrights at 21/- and 3/4,000 men in alkali works at 16/-.<sup>2</sup> Although the number of shipwrights is clearly too large there is no reason to think that these figures are generally inaccurate and it is certain that a Chartist would not exaggerate the wages of working men. At the end of the year another Newcastle Chartist, Edward Charlton, in seeking to explain to the District and Border Chartist Convention why there had been no large scale support for Chartism in the north east, commented that

“Wages were not so low in the district of the Tyne as in most parts of England. Engineers earned an average wage of 18s. to 28s. per week; labourers from 10s. to 14s.; tailors nominally received 24s. per week, but on an average they were hardly half employed; masons had from 18s. to 22s. per week, – but taking into account lost time they did not earn more than 15s. per week the year round: potters from 14s., for labourers, to 18s. to 22s. for engravers; shipwrights 27s. per week when in full employment; brass founders from 21s. to 24s. per week; joiners same as masons; pitmen [...] 15s. per week; glass-bottlemakers [...] 18s. per week; the plate-glassmakers can make about 25s. to 30s. per week; fergemen 28s. per week.”<sup>3</sup>

The standard factors suggested as background to the development of the Chartist movement do not seem to have been of particular importance in the north east. This lack of agitation and interest in the immediate pre-Chartist period does in fact account for the fact that the early response of the two counties of Northumberland and Durham to Chartism

<sup>1</sup> See J. W. House, *North Eastern England: population movements and the landscape since the early nineteenth century* (King's College, Newcastle upon Tyne, Department of Geography Research Series, 1, 1954).

<sup>2</sup> British Museum, Additional Mss 34245A, ff. 66-7, dated 26 Feb. 1839.

<sup>3</sup> Quoted in *Northern Liberator*, 7 Dec. 1839.

was modest and that the region was only of importance to the national movement for a few weeks in the summer of 1839, contrary to the standard conclusion, such as that provided by Maehl, that "Chartism in Northumberland and Durham attained a stridency and vehemence which was rarely matched and never exceeded elsewhere."<sup>1</sup>

The revival of political radicalism on Tyneside seems to have come in the summer of 1837. The Newcastle Working Men's Association was formed with Thomas Hepburn, the pitmen's leader, as its president. On 9 July the association sent an address to what was virtually its parent association, the London Working Men's Association, whose moderate views the Newcastle association at first appeared to have adopted. Both Hepburn and a number of its other early leaders had been members of the Northern Political Union in 1831-2. The new association held regular meetings during the second half of 1837 and the first half of 1838, without attracting a large following. In addition there were a number of other working men's associations formed, as at Winlaton and South Shields. The second element in the emergence of Chartism in the region lay with the *Northern Liberator* and its support for the anti-poor law agitation. Its leaders were Thomas Doubleday, member of a well known local Quaker family and wealthy partner in a Tyneside soap-boiling firm, who had been a leading light in the reform agitation of 1831-2 and Robert Blakey, a prosperous furrier, who had been mayor of Morpeth in 1836-7. Blakey was a writer of some eminence and was to become Professor of Logic and Metaphysics at the Queen's University, Belfast, in 1849. These two purchased the *Northern Liberator* from Beaumont at the end of 1837 and continued the build-up of a public agitation for political reform. In Sunderland, the main town of County Durham, the leaders were James Williams and George Binns. Binns was the son of Quakers in the drapery trade (the fore-runner of the present department store of that name at Sunderland and Newcastle). He was entered in the family firm but soon grew dissatisfied with the life and joined Williams in the latter's printing and bookselling business. Williams subsequently became an alderman of Sunderland and the proprietor of the *Sunderland Times*, one of the town's leading newspapers.

These are unusual credentials for Chartists and it is therefore worth commenting on one of the lasting features of Chartism in the region, the links between people we would place in the middle and working classes. The middle class element within Chartism is clear among the initiating personnel mentioned and even O'Connor acknowledged the high

<sup>1</sup> Maehl, "Chartist disturbances", p. 389.

middle-class content of Newcastle Chartism. This is perhaps also the moment to comment on the occupations of the Chartists where known. In his article Maehl commented that "the backbone of the movement were [sic] the coalminers",<sup>1</sup> a comment which is too simple and, as it is hoped to show, basically untrue. There certainly were pitmen involved in the movement. Hepburn was an early leader and many pitmen may have supported Chartism because of Hepburn's influence. Among the known occupations of speakers at meetings, or those Chartists who were arrested, only one was a pitman and in general it would seem that the pitmen were only of importance on the occasion of major meetings when they made up a considerable proportion of the crowds. Of the other leaders who may be identified from reports of meetings we have three masons, two shoemakers, a master shoemaker, the owner of a prosperous bookshop and music store, a bricklayer, a joiner, a chemist, a publican, a chemical operative, a basket maker, a blacksmith, a gardener, an operative coachmaker, a sailcloth weaver, two surgeons, a tailor and a tobacconist. The list contains the usual radical shoemakers and a number of building workers, probably because of the Dobson-Grainger scheme in the centre of Newcastle which had attracted a mixed bag of building workers to the town from various parts of the country. These two sections apart, the rest of the Chartist leaders present a great variety of occupations. It may be said that the leaders are the most literate and possibly unrepresentative of the occupations of their followers. The only check which can be offered comes from the occupations of those arrested following a disturbance after a Chartist meeting in Newcastle. They were two joiners, a mason, a painter, a keelman, a waterman, a smith, an engineer, an engineman, a tobacconist, a labourer, a chainmaker, and a chemical operative.<sup>2</sup> Again there was a broad occupational base, with the striking building workers to the fore, although it is doubtful that any particular group of workers provided specific support. One further general point may be made to relate the strength of Chartism to the population. Although unsatisfactory, the only way in which this can be done is to compare the population figure for Northumberland and Durham of 700,000 with the 39,000 signatures from the region to the Chartist petition of 1839, giving a signature/population rate of one in 18.

That the revival of political radicalism in the north east did not come only at a working-class level is suggested by the fact that on 4 December 1837 John Fife, the mayor of Newcastle, who had been a prominent reformer in 1831-2, chaired a meeting in Newcastle.<sup>3</sup> It was called to

<sup>1</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 393.

<sup>2</sup> *Northern Liberator*, 10 Aug. 1839.

<sup>3</sup> *Ibid.*, 9 Dec. 1837.

express regret at Lord John Russell's "finality" speech and it was addressed by Doubleday and Edward Charlton, later prominent Chartists. There was, however, little activity in the early months of 1838 – the only incident of note being a meeting of pitmen from 20 Durham collieries, called to protest about their conditions of service, which ended by condemning the New Poor Law and supporting universal suffrage.<sup>1</sup> Early in June, however, John Collins visited the north east in an attempt to whip up support for the National Petition and meetings were held in various towns, while at the end of the month there was a major meeting on the Town Moor, Newcastle, with Feargus O'Connor as the main speaker. The size of the crowd is in some doubt, the *Northern Liberator* giving 70,000 to 80,000 in its report of the meeting and 60,000 in its leading article, but it was certainly the largest radical meeting since 1831-2.<sup>2</sup> In his account of the meeting Gammage stated that there were fourteen bands in the procession and gives an account of the banners carried, many of them with poetic inscriptions, which makes one wonder from where the Chartists obtained their knowledge of Byron, Burns, Goldsmith, etc.<sup>3</sup> Also in the procession were detachments representing various trades and in the following year a number of trade Chartist societies were formed, including coach-makers, masons, cordwainers and boot and shoe makers. Although there is no direct evidence to show that these societies were synonymous with their respective trade organisations, it does suggest that there was some connexion in the area between Chartism and the organised working classes. It is interesting to note that the trades mentioned were skilled ones, a piece of evidence which adds a little support to the recent view that there was far more support from craft workers and from trade unions for Chartism than was at one time thought.

The meeting itself was a peaceful one and the language used was moderate. There were a few incidents. Thomas Devyr, a reporter for the *Northern Liberator*, celebrated the passing of the procession by firing a gun from a window of the *Liberator* office. There was an attempt by their employers to prevent the workers at Cookson's alkali works at South Shields from attending. Finally, during the meeting, a troop of military was marched across the Town Moor, very close to the meeting. This was a foolish move by the authorities which led to much criticism from the radicals and a rather far-fetched comment from the *Northern Star* that if a single shot had been fired Newcastle would have

<sup>1</sup> *Ibid.*, 24 Feb. 1838.

<sup>2</sup> *Ibid.*, 30 June and 7 July 1838.

<sup>3</sup> Gammage, *op. cit.*, pp. 22-8.

blazed.<sup>1</sup> Apart from these incidents the meeting heard only the usual long addresses with regard to the history of political representation. Even making allowance for the impact of the spoken as against the written word it seems incredible that crowds should bother to attend, especially since many of them could not possibly have heard what was going on. This leads to the unanswerable question as to how many people attending such a meeting were genuine Chartists and how many were merely curious as to what was going on. It is, however, important to point out that there was much genuine enthusiasm with some groups walking distances of up to 20 miles to Newcastle to attend the meeting.

Little of the enthusiasm outlasted the meeting and the area remained quiet for the rest of 1838, although the Northern Political Union (NPU) was revived in September and the Sunderland (later Durham County) Charter Association was formed. Up to the early months of 1839 the Charter seems to have been of little importance as a rallying point – the *Northern Liberator* writing of the “Movement” or the “National Movement” or the “Cause of the People”. A few meetings were held but it was not until Christmas Day 1838 that one of any size was held. This was held in the Forth, an open space in Newcastle, for the purpose of electing delegates to the forthcoming Chartist Convention.<sup>2</sup> The account which Dr Schoyen gives of Julian Harney’s journey from London,<sup>3</sup> leaving at 8 p.m. on the 23rd and arriving in the early hours of the 25th, riding on the top of the coach and being unable to afford meals, gives some idea of the enthusiasm generated by Chartism and of the preparation behind a mass meeting. The *Northern Liberator* estimated the attendance at the meeting at 40,000,<sup>4</sup> on the basis that the Forth was 7,000 to 8,000 square yards in extent, that it was two-thirds full and that there were seven persons per square yard – an example which shows the need to take estimates of crowd numbers with extreme care. From this meeting may be noted a build up of violent language in the region’s Chartism. The Newcastle Working Men’s Association (which amalgamated with the NPU) was one of the very few country associations to criticize the London Working Men’s Association’s address to the Irish people in September 1838 which had denounced physical force. The development of forceful attitudes, however, was clearly seen from the meeting. Robert Lowery, a South

<sup>1</sup> Northern Star, 30 June 1838.

<sup>2</sup> It is interesting to note that Newcastle was one of the last towns to elect its delegates. Even London, which had been later than most other towns, had elected its delegates in September.

<sup>3</sup> A. R. Schoyen, *The Chartist Challenge* (1958), pp. 41-2.

<sup>4</sup> Northern Liberator, 29 Dec. 1838.

Shields tailor, Julian Harney and Dr John Taylor, the delegates chosen, were all extremists. Taylor concluded his speech by saying that “should all else fail him, his own hand should write his epitaph with a steel pen, in characters of blood, upon the brow of a tyrant”, a sentiment which was greeted with loud cheers.

During the first six months of 1839 there was sporadic Chartist activity in the region, with a fund set up to provide for lectures on Chartism. Various district and trade meetings were held, signatures were collected for the National Petition and money for the National Rent. At one meeting in January the Chartists resolved to support and defend Stephens, who had been arrested for sedition, “from harm at all hazards, both with their purses and, if need be, with their right arms”.<sup>1</sup> Later in the month there came an early example of what was to become a regular Chartist tactic. At a public meeting in Newcastle to consider the repeal of the Corn Laws, Thomas Doubleday moved an amendment in favour of the Charter, which was passed by a large majority since the Chartists had packed the meeting. But even the limited progress which was made was disturbed by a division in the Chartist ranks between a Gateshead party, including Dr Taylor, which supported the Whig-Radical *Gateshead Observer* and the main body supporting the *Northern Liberator*.<sup>2</sup> As the spring of 1839 drew on there was some evidence of a build up of interest. On Good Friday there was a meeting of some 5,000 Durham pitmen to support the Charter and a few weeks later a letter from a pitman in the *Liberator* complained of the decision of the owners of Coxhoe colliery to deduct 1/6d for house rent from the men’s wages instead of providing housing free. The letter ended with the political answer to economic repression, “Let us rally round the Chartists”.<sup>3</sup> On Whit Monday Newcastle saw probably the biggest Chartist meeting yet held in the region, as part of the simultaneous meetings throughout the country. The *Northern Star* claimed an attendance of 140,000, the *Northern Liberator*, less optimistically, 80,000.<sup>4</sup> There was a considerable influx of support from outlying villages. This was one of the important features of the area’s Chartism – Newcastle was a psychological centre rather than an actual centre of Chartist strength. The usual support came from the decaying iron-making centre of Winlaton – once famous as the home of Crowley’s crew and since 1819 a hotbed of radicalism. Bedlington, another iron-making centre, sent a contingent, steamers brought Chartists from the Shields and processions came

<sup>1</sup> *Ibid.*, 12 Jan, 1839.

<sup>2</sup> *Ibid.*, 2 Feb. 1839.

<sup>3</sup> *Ibid.*, 27 April 1839.

<sup>4</sup> *Northern Star*, quoted in *Place Papers*, British Museum, Add. Mss 27821, f. 191, and *Northern Liberator*, 25 May 1839.

from many pit villages. That Whit Monday was a free day for many workers undoubtedly meant that many people were there out of curiosity and having nothing better to do. The meeting itself raises two matters of interest. The secretary of the NPU wrote to the Chartist Convention to complain that Newcastle had been neglected in the appointment of delegates from the Convention to attend the meeting, even though it was among the first towns to apply.<sup>1</sup> This may be taken as suggesting either that the Convention thought that the area did not need the attraction of the big names or else that other regions offered a better chance of a good response. Secondly, the chairman of the meeting, Hepburn, rebuked Harney for the violence of the language used in his speech. The early, moderate Chartist leaders in the area were becoming concerned about growing unrest and it is clear that their control was waning and that of the extremists rising. Activity was increasing. A few days later, on 6 June, a meeting, chaired by the mayor of Newcastle in the Guildhall, to consider the need for national education was taken over by the Chartists – Doubleday was voted into the chair and an amendment for universal suffrage passed.<sup>2</sup>

This period was probably the high-spot of Newcastle Chartism but it was tinged with sets-back. Dr Taylor was arrested in Birmingham on a charge of sedition on 5 July and three days later Harney was arrested at Bedlington. It is surprising that there was little response to the latter event, since Harney was very popular in the region and there had been talk of defending the delegates with force if necessary. Bedlington, one of the outlying portions of County Durham in Northumberland, was very disturbed in the summer of 1839. Led by Henry Cronin, an Irish labourer, its reform association was following a policy of exclusive dealing backed up by intimidation, with Ralph Charlton, a discharged soldier, drilling the Chartists nightly on a road outside the village. Correspondence between Michael Longridge, manager and part-owner of Bedlington ironworks, the village's largest employer, and local shopkeepers shows the effect.<sup>3</sup> One contains the information, "Orange the butcher has joined the Chartists and pays them 6/- a month from fear of what they would do to his cattle." William Dickinson informed Longridge that the Chartists were boycotting his shop and that Ruecastle, a Newcastle Chartist, who spoke at a meeting on 3 June, had bought 50 firelocks and some bayonets from G. Charlton of Gateshead. Much of Bedlington's trouble was psychological – it had no police force and the nearest magistrate who could act was 20 miles

<sup>1</sup> R. C. Elliott to W. Lovett, 2 May 1839, British Museum, Add. Mss 34245A.

<sup>2</sup> *Northern Liberator*, 8 June 1839.

<sup>3</sup> The letters are in HO 40/42.

away in Co. Durham. After pressure from Longridge through Lord Howick, MP for the area, the Home Office sent two London policemen to Bedlington in mid-June. Together with the fact that a military force was stationed in the village after Harney's arrest, this no doubt accounted for the lack of response to his arrest. The Chartists at Blyth passed a resolution<sup>1</sup> criticising their Bedlington colleagues for allowing Harney to be taken but there was little that they could have done since he was arrested and taken from the town in the early hours of the morning. There is little doubt that many of the Chartists genuinely meant to carry out their threats but they were too ill-organised and the forces of the authorities were too strong and in most cases the Chartists recognised these facts.

There were, however, still triumphs to come. There was a major meeting at Sunderland on 9 July, which was attended by several hundred pitmen who had commandeered a train to take them to the meeting.<sup>2</sup> Nightly meetings were also held in the Forth in Newcastle from the second week in July and although they passed off peaceably there were processions through the town to and from the meetings. The Tory *Newcastle Courant* made light of them, commenting that they were "rather recreative to many and [more] amusing to the inhabitants than otherwise".<sup>3</sup> The local authorities, however, were more concerned, particularly after the rejection of the Charter by Parliament and the decision of the Chartist Convention to embark on a month's "National Holiday" from 12 August. In addition, on Saturday night, 20 July, there was some rioting in Newcastle, which, although it appears to have had nothing to do with the Chartists but to have stemmed from a drunken street brawl, increased alarm. So early as February the mayor of Newcastle had sounded out the Home Office on the possibility of arming the police but in the peaceful circumstances of the time received a firm negative. By midsummer the situation was different. General Napier made Newcastle one of his main centres with 900 troops and special constables were sworn in and weapons obtained from the Home Office to arm them. At Gateshead 200 specials were sworn, 500 at Newcastle, 800 at North Shields and 1,000 at South Shields. In addition a sloop of war was stationed on the Tyne.

This was a considerable force – with what was it faced? There was much intangible comment with regard to drilling of Chartists and the purchase of weapons. Local reminiscences led to one comment on "The manufacture of 'caltrops' and 'pike-heads', immense numbers of these

<sup>1</sup> Northern Liberator, 13 July 1839.

<sup>2</sup> Maehl, "Chartist Disturbances", pp. 395-6.

<sup>3</sup> Newcastle Courant, 19 July 1839.

were made by the men of Winlaton, for fourpence and sixpence, and men who formerly made less than three shillings a day, were now obtaining fifteen shillings, by this illegal calling."<sup>1</sup> That some of the Chartists actually had pikes is clear. After the failure of the "National Holiday" the clerks to the North Shields magistrates reported, "several pikes have been taken from the Chartists and sixty more have been given up voluntarily". There were clearly preparations for violence but the reality of the disturbances was more mild. The NPU and the Durham County Charter Association jointly issued a very strongly worded address to the middle classes, calling on them for the last time "in the language of brotherhood" to join with the Chartists.<sup>2</sup> For this Binns and Williams were arrested and later sentenced to six months imprisonment for publishing a seditious document. This, together with the banning of out-door meetings and military guards on the disturbed collieries restricted the potential of Sunderland Chartism. In Newcastle the magistrates banned the meetings in the Forth but on 29 July the NPU submitted a request to the mayor for a meeting the following evening. Unwisely refusal was delayed until 6 p.m. on the 30th and inevitably some Chartists arrived for the meeting. John Fife, the mayor, together with a party of magistrates and constables went to the Forth to see that there were no disturbances. At 7.40p.m. the police were called out of the Westgate Road station and were kept waiting at the end of Westgate Road near the Forth. The meeting was short, largely because only a few of the leaders were present since the meeting had been banned, and ended at 8.30. Some of those present, however, decided to march through the town and on leaving the Forth came face to face with the mayor and his party who were jostled and some stones were thrown.<sup>3</sup> The police and troops were then ordered to disperse the crowd, which even Devyr admitted they did coolly and sensibly.<sup>4</sup> This then was Newcastle's Peterloo – "the battle of the Forth". Dr Schoyen described it in the following words

"an outbreak on 30 July, which developed into a hard-fought struggle [...] involving some 6,000 Chartists, half of whom were armed, and a force of two companies of infantry, a troop of dragoons, and 500 police and special constables. This was almost on the scale of regular warfare. And when it is noted that the closest

<sup>1</sup> J. Maughan, "History of Blaydon District", in the Blaydon Courier from March 1955 (bound copy of the full series in the Northumberland Room, Newcastle Public Library).

<sup>2</sup> Copy in HO 40/46.

<sup>3</sup> See Maehl, "Chartist disturbances", pp. 402-3, and HO 40/46.

<sup>4</sup> T. A. Devyr, *The Odd Book of the Nineteenth Century* (New York, 1882), p. 186.

reinforcement to Newcastle was a small contingent of troops sixty miles away at Carlisle, and that the Chartists involved were only a portion of the thousands in the colliery and iron-working villages clustered around Newcastle, it is hardly overstatement to describe the situation as being potentially revolutionary."<sup>1</sup>

It is a long time since anything approaching regular warfare did not lead to a single serious injury!

Although the affair was nowhere near as serious as it has sometimes been painted it did increase the alarm felt by the local authorities, particularly in the light of the forthcoming "National Holiday". There was considerable support in the area for the "Holiday", there being only one dissentient at a council meeting of the NPU to a resolution supporting the idea. Some pressure was also put on the Convention to bring forward the date of commencement. On 12 July the following letter was sent by the secretary of the NPU to the Chartist Convention

"I am instructed by the council of the Newcastle Political Union to inform you that nearly all the colliers in the North are laid in with a stern determination on the part of the men not to commence work again until they have gained their rights. We have done all in our power to try to get them to wait for the commands of the Convention. The answer is, that they have waited long enough for aught they have to expect from their tyrants. They add, 'We are prepared to commence'. In fact, they have done so; for no sooner did the news of Dr Taylor's arrest arrive, followed by that of Messrs Collins and Lovett, than the strike commenced, and it has gone on increasing until now. There are more than 25,000 pitmen alone on strike, besides the town trades, who are in expectation of your orders daily. It is earnestly requested that the time of strike be not delayed, but that it be put in force by Monday next, or the consequences in this district will be dreadful to contemplate; and if the Convention wish to retain the confidence of the people here, they must speedily act. [...]

P.S. Since writing the above, I hear that ten more of the collieries have struck, with the aggregate amount of men, – namely, 7,000."<sup>2</sup>

This letter may well have been a determining factor of the Convention's decision of 17 July to call the "National Holiday". Nevertheless the information contained in the letter was utterly false,

<sup>1</sup> Schoyen, *op. cit.*, p. 80.

<sup>2</sup> Reproduced in *The Charter*, 21 July 1839.

although it has been reproduced uncritically in a number of books.<sup>1</sup> There is no evidence to show that any of the pitmen were out on strike, quite apart from the gross exaggeration of the total numbers of pitmen. In 1839 all employees in coal-mining in the north east probably totalled about 30,000, many of whom were boys.<sup>2</sup> Moreover the suggestion in the postscript of ten collieries employing 7,000 men gives a totally erroneous impression of size. As late as the 1880's only a few of the largest collieries on the East Durham plateau employed 1,000 workers and in 1850 the large Haswell colliery had an underground establishment of only 289 men and 139 boys. In 1839 there would not have been ten collieries in the whole region with average labour forces of even 500.

There undoubtedly were pitmen who were Chartists and anxious to strike, but they were far from being the majority as is usually suggested. On 3 August the colliery viewers gave the magistrates an account of the significance of Chartism in the Tyneside collieries.<sup>3</sup> In the state of concern which existed they were unlikely to play down the Chartist influence. Of Wallsend, John Buddle said the "real number of Chartists [was] 30" and the colliery "could muster abt 60 *trusty* men", of Backworth "well disposed" and of Benwell "only 3 or 4 Chartists". Of Willington and Burdon Main it was said they were "quiet and not join Chartists but by absolute compulsion", and of Percy Main, Killingworth and Burraton, Nicholas Wood said there were "very few Chartists". On the other hand there were collieries where Chartism was more effective. Walker and Heaton had "many bad men" and one-third of those at Heaton were Chartists and "the remainder would join a large party and have mostly subscribed to the Fund". At Seghill the "great majority Chartists. They meet in a body every evening. 180 hewers are armed with pikes" the viewer believed. At Cowpen the men

<sup>1</sup> G. Rudé, *The Crowd in History, 1830-1848* (1964), p. 182; R. Challinor and B. Ripley, *The Miner's Association - a Trade Union in the Age of the Chartists* (1968); E. Miller (ed.), *Eyewitness - the North East in the early Nineteenth Century* (Newcastle upon Tyne, 1968), pp. 32-3; and G. D. H. Cole and A. G. Filson, *British Working Class Movements - Select Documents, 1789-1875* (1951), pp. 392-3.

<sup>2</sup> Accurate evidence on employment in the mines in the early nineteenth century is difficult to obtain. In his report for 1846 the mines' commissioner, H. S. Tremenheere, estimated upwards of 22,000 for the underground establishment of all north-east coal mines (quoted in Cole and Filson, *op. cit.* p. 468); the usual average was one workmen above ground for every two underground, which would give a total employment of about 33,000. In 1844 the Newcastle Coal Trade Office gave a figure of 34,000 (quoted in Challinor and Ripley, *op. cit.*, p. 142).

<sup>3</sup> Northumberland County Record Office, ZRI 27/12.

were "Very much organised. Politically inclined. Unionists then in sections now Chartists. 6 or 8 leaders of sections of abt 20 in numbers. Believes *generally* armed with guns *some* have pikes." At Hartley one-third of the Chartists had "*recently* become so since Scaffold Hill meeting. The greater part of the 3rd indifferent. Nothing short of force wd induce them to lie idle." One colliery viewer also noted that he thought that many of the pitmen had become Chartists because of intimidation. The general verdict was that few of the pitmen would come out on strike – a prescient one in view of the alarm which existed. In 1831-2 the local authorities made clear to the Home Office that the striking pitmen were not involved in political radicalism and this view was endorsed by senior naval and military officers drafted to the area at the time and during the strike of 1844.<sup>1</sup> There is little evidence to suggest that the pitmen had in general shown any great swing to radicalism in between those dates.

At the end of July the NPU passed a resolution to support the "National Holiday"<sup>2</sup> and, as the major Chartist body in the region, sent letters informing other Chartist associations of its decision. The response was surprising. Bishopwearmouth PU called for a delegate meeting to decide whether the strike was the right thing. And the DCCA issued a conciliatory address to the middle classes, which contrasted with the earlier inflammatory one and James Williams expressed surprise that the NPU had not consulted its neighbours and he called on the Newcastle leaders to go to a meeting at Sunderland on the evening of the 12th August, the day the strike was to begin, to consider the matter.<sup>3</sup> Williams commented that despite his "warm admiration for the spirit displayed by the men of the Tyne [...] the general holiday is unadvised and premature and ought not now to take place". Thus the possibility of an organised strike in the north east was scotched and the NPU withdrew its support.

On 5 August the Council of the Chartist Convention, acting on such information, resolved

"That from the evidence which has reached this council from various parts of the country, we are unanimously of the opinion that the people are not prepared to carry out the 'Sacred Month' on the 12th of August. The same evidence, however, convinces us

<sup>1</sup> See, for example, the evidence which Dr McCord has assembled with regard to the comments of military officers and local magistrates, "The Government of Tyneside, 1800-1850, in: Transactions of the Royal Historical Society, fifth series, XX (1970), pp. 10-11, and 19.

<sup>2</sup> Newcastle upon Tyne Public Library, T. Wilson Collection, VII, f. 1541.

<sup>3</sup> Maehl, "Chartist disturbances", p. 405.

that the great body of the working people including most of the trades, may be induced to cease work on the 12th inst. for one, two or three days, in order to devote the whole of that time to solemn processions and meetings."<sup>1</sup>

The council also called on the trades of Great Britain to "co-operate as united bodies, with their more distressed brethren, in making a grand moral demonstration on the 12th instant".

Even this expectation was not fulfilled on Tyneside, where the twelfth turned out to be inglorious. On the 12th Fife informed the Home Office that "the Strike or Holiday with which we were threatened has proved almost an entire failure so far as the working classes of the Town are concerned, a few of them only having left their employment." Only about 40 people attended a Chartist meeting in the Forth in the afternoon of the 12th. South of the Wear the collieries stopped work, as did three in north Durham (noticeably the newer collieries with their immigrant labour forces which lacked a conservative tradition). There was little trouble at the Tyneside collieries. At Seghill and Cramlington the men struck but decided against attempting to turn out other collieries and at Cowpen the pitmen barricaded the village square but fled on hearing a rumour that troops were coming. The local authorities were well prepared. The magistrates and military toured the colliery districts and assured the well-disposed of the authorities' protection if they remained at work. At Gosforth some of the pitmen refused to work on the 13th but a few of their leaders were committed to the House of Correction and the men returned to work. Seghill colliery was still out on the 14th and the magistrates executed warrants against six of the leaders and the following day the colliery was again working.<sup>2</sup> In his study of the miners, Welbourne suggested an economic reason for the failure of the miners to give serious support to Chartism. He wrote

"though Chartist teachings had a welcome among the pitmen there was no readiness to sacrifice prosperity for political principle. The man who would starve to raise his wages would not strike in the cause of manhood suffrage. Here and there a colliery sent its subscription to the National rent. Here and there the pitmen made a holiday of the first day of the Sacred Month. But they went to work on the morrow, refusing to be misled further by the foolish promise of universal action."<sup>3</sup>

<sup>1</sup> Quoted in Cole and Filson, *op. cit.*, p. 367.

<sup>2</sup> Sir M. W. Ridley to Duke of Northumberland, 15 Aug. 1839, Northumberland County Record Office, ZRI 27/12.

<sup>3</sup> E. Welbourne, *The Miner's Unions of Northumberland and Durham* (Cambridge, 1923), p. 54.

There was also contemporary comment by colliery viewers and others as to the effect which Wesleyan Methodism had had in making the pitmen more law abiding and opposed to such Chartist demands as secular education and also to the more violent effusions of Chartist speakers. Against this must be set the fact that the Primitive Methodists, also strong in north Durham, provided a number of leaders and techniques for Chartism.

The only other group which appears to have acted on the "National Holiday" was the Winlaton iron-workers, who toured the local villages trying to persuade the men out but without success. On the 15th Fife wrote again to the Home Office commenting that "The collieries which struck work on Monday, are, with one exception, all at work again and it is hoped that Chartism is altogether on the decline. The town is quite quiet and all the manufactories at work." Chartism in the area was in decline, partly as a result of the failure of the strike, to which many Chartists had been looking forward with great expectations, and partly from the effect of the arrest of a number of leaders among the pitmen. But decline had set in before the strike and was largely due to poor organisation and lack of co-ordination. Chartism could not effectively maintain the interest of its rank-and-file let alone present a serious challenge to authority. The situation worsened following the arrest of many local leaders on charges of using seditious language and their subsequent reluctance to get into further trouble. Williams and Binns were eventually gaoled for six months at Darlington, Wm Byrne for three months at Durham and John Bell, printer of the *Liberator*, received six months. In general the sentences were light in comparison with the contemporary penal code. There is no evidence of a "witch-hunt". Only the four mentioned above were imprisoned in the north east, while many other local Chartists who had been arrested were acquitted at the Assizes or had no evidence brought against them. In the case of Edward Charlton the Newcastle magistrates went so far as to obtain Home Office agreement that the Treasury should pay the expenses of a trial and then dropped the case because they had decided that there was insufficient evidence.<sup>1</sup>

Dispersion of interest was also a factor in the decline of Chartism in the area. Late in August 1839 the Newcastle Chartists opened a joint stock provision store, which Devyr claimed soon had a weekly turnover of £2,000. That figure was almost certainly an exaggeration but the store lasted for two years and, together with the many similar stores set up in other parts of the region, undoubtedly took up much Chartist interest. One delegate to the Border Counties' Convention in

<sup>1</sup> HO 40/55, 1 Dec. 1839 and 4 Jan. 1840.

December 1839 considered that the joint stock activity had absorbed political agitation. A further diversion came with the formation in September 1839 of a Newcastle Universal Suffrage Teetotal Association, resolving "That it is the opinion of this meeting that intemperance is the greatest disqualification for the exercise of the elective franchise, and the greatest barrier to the obtainment, by the people, of their political rights."<sup>1</sup> There followed again the setting up of similar associations in the region. Provision stores and temperance associations dealt with practical matters which could hold the attention of working men – Chartism, by contrast, was a theoretical concept which had to build up to something tangible if it was to retain interest and this it had patently failed to do in the summer of 1839. During 1840, also, interest in British foreign policy acted as a diversion from Chartism. Newcastle was the centre of the Russophobe David Urquhart's "Foreign Policy Movement" and a considerable number of the local Chartist leaders, including Lowery, Doubleday, Ayr and Mason, were drawn into that movement.

Chartism in the area was by no means finished but it relapsed into smaller meetings at less frequent intervals. The NPU was responsible for calling a convention of the border counties, which met in December 1839. The delegates commented on the reasons for the decline of Chartism and issued an address calling on the people of Great Britain to elect delegates to a new general convention.<sup>2</sup> Shortly after this the NPU became moribund, although it was revived briefly in April 1840. One remaining aspect of local Chartism of importance at this time is the question of revolutionary plotting. Devyr, in his reminiscences published 40 years later, claimed that local Chartism continued underground after August 1839 and that 60,000 pikes were manufactured in the next few months and that preparations for a rising to coincide with the Newport Affair were checked by the failure of Frost's rising.<sup>3</sup> Further plans were made for a rising to take place on 12 January if Frost and his companions were sentenced to death. Grenades and fuses were said to have been made in Newcastle and shells were to have been produced at Winlaton but it proved impossible to obtain the use of a forge since they were too well guarded. When the night for the rising came only 70 out of the 700 expected turned up. It was decided to abandon the rising and Devyr returned home, only to be sent back by his wife who feared that the others would take desperate measures. He returned to the meeting in time to prevent Mason from going out to

<sup>1</sup> *Northern Liberator*, 7 Sept. 1839.

<sup>2</sup> *Ibid.*, 7 Dec. 1839.

<sup>3</sup> Devyr, *op. cit.*, pp. 193-206.

raise others by the pre-arranged signal of lighting the torch. Devyr claimed that a delegate from Blaydon, who turned out to be a spy, tried to prevent him from speaking but he was able to persuade the meeting to disperse quietly. Devyr's evidence is worth repeating because of the evidence of planned risings at the same periods in such towns as Bradford and London. With the heavy infiltration of the Chartist movement by spies it seems surprising, however, that there are no reports to the Home Office of any plotting in Newcastle.<sup>1</sup> There had been much academic discussion of the extent and significance of the revolutionary plotting within Chartism and there will, no doubt, be much more. It is, however, unlikely that this will ever reach useful conclusions in the very nature of the evidence on the subject and from that available for Newcastle it would seem likely that, both in 1839-40 and again in 1848, those prepared to take part in a rising were a small, poorly organised and potentially ineffective group from within Chartism.

Concentration on the events of 1839 seems justified, partly because it was in that year that Chartism stood the best chance (and even then an infinitesimal one) of obtaining some of its demands and secondly because it was at its most strident and effective in Northumberland and Durham. Thereafter it was a pale image of its former self, unlike Chartism in London which became stronger in the 1840's than it had been in 1839.

In the early months of 1840 there were intermittent Chartist meetings in the area. A delegate was elected to the Manchester Convention, held in February and in March the local Chartists had sufficient support to take over an anti-Corn Law meeting, at which they supported repeal of such laws but expressed the necessity for extension of the suffrage as a preliminary. Enthusiasm declined, however, and there was no delegate from the region to the Manchester meeting in July, which considered methods of re-activating Chartism and led to the foundation of the National Charter Association. In August, however, a meeting was held in Newcastle to reorganise local Chartism and to oppose the Foreign Policy Movement, which was said to be diverting working men from the Charter.<sup>2</sup> As a result a Newcastle branch of the National Charter Association was formed in September but, although it held regular meetings, it did not lead to any great revival and in December the *Northern Liberator* ceased publication because of lack of support.

<sup>1</sup> Maehl, "Chartist Disturbances", p. 414, n. 2, found one reference to support Devyr's testimony.

<sup>2</sup> Handbill dated 22 Aug. 1840, copy in Newcastle Public Library, T. Wilson Collection, VII, f. 1648.

During 1841 Chartist meetings of small size were held sporadically and the only event of interest was that Bronterre O'Brien stood for Newcastle at the general election and won the show of hands. Since he did not go to the poll the other two candidates were returned unopposed and counsel considered that O'Brien was legally elected but the cost of petitioning against the elected members was too great.<sup>1</sup>

At the time of the second major Chartist flare-up in the country, in the late summer of 1842, north-eastern newspapers were able to treat the matter without concern, since the region remained little affected. The *Gateshead Observer* did, however, make a shrewd comment on the authorship of the disturbances. It commented, "The cause of the outbreak is as clear as the noonday's sun. It is idle, it is dishonest, to waste time in contending whether Chartists or Anti-Corn Law Leaguers have set the rioters in motion. Misery, Ruin, Starvation – emaciated wives and dying children – are the instigators to crime. [...] The Stomach, not the Charter, is the mainspring of the 'insurrection'."<sup>2</sup> The Newcastle Chartists held a series of meetings, with estimated attendances of 1,000 to 2,000, at one of which a resolution of the Clackmannan miners, to strike for the Charter, was approved but nothing was done. It may well be that distress was less marked in the region than in other parts of the country. At the end of 1841 the chief clerk to Robert Stephenson and Co., an engineering firm employing more than 1,000 workmen, could write, "Within the last six months we have gradually discharged about fifty hands, but looking at the work we actually have before us and in prospect I think we shall not be called upon to continue this reduction to any extent."<sup>3</sup> Although 1841-2 saw a falling away in the expansion of industrial activity the region's expanding industries were not as severely hit as were textiles and, indeed, the years from 1836 to 1843 saw a vast expansion in coal mining in the Tyneside area. In June 1842 there were 3,468 men unemployed in Newcastle (with 8,124 dependents),<sup>4</sup> a situation, which, while serious, was not of the proportions of the textile towns, with their satirical, yet pathetic, notices like "Stockport lo let". During the summer of 1842 Newcastle Corporation raised a subscription and some hundreds of the unemployed were given work on drainage schemes on the Town Moor at a

<sup>1</sup> Hovell, *op. cit.*, pp. 239-40.

<sup>2</sup> *Gateshead Observer*, 20 Aug. 1842.

<sup>3</sup> J. G. H. Warren, *A century of locomotive building by Robert Stephenson & Co. 1823-1923* (Newcastle upon Tyne, 1923, reprinted Newton Abbot, 1970), p. 95.

<sup>4</sup> S. Middlebrook, *Newcastle upon Tyne: its growth and its achievement* (2nd ed., Wakefield, 1968), p. 178.

wage of one shilling to one shilling and sixpence a day plus a penny roll of bread.

Another factor limiting the response to Chartism was the growing commitment of the pitmen to trade unionism, which led up to the major strike in the north east in 1844. Although some pitmen maintained connexions with Chartism and the division between unionism and Chartism was less marked than was once thought, the local pitmen refused to respond to a call from William Beesley to strike for the Charter in support of their Lancashire and Staffordshire colleagues.<sup>1</sup>

During the summer of 1842 it is also interesting to note that many of the Chartist leaders of 1839 were present at a meeting which included a number of middle-class reformers, among them John Fife, whom the Chartists had reviled for his actions as mayor of Newcastle in 1839. The meeting acted amicably to elect James Sinclair, the secretary of the local branch of the National Charter Association, as Newcastle's delegate to the National Complete Suffrage Conference. The *Gateshead Observer* commented, "A more important meeting has not been held in Newcastle for some time; for although the prejudices between 'fustian' and 'broadcloth' occasionally manifested themselves, there was a much nearer approach to a friendly union than could well have been expected."<sup>2</sup> The old accord between middle- and working-class reformers in Newcastle had not been damaged for long by the events of 1839.<sup>3</sup>

<sup>1</sup> For the connexion between the pitmen and Chartism see the general evidence produced by Challinor and Ripley, *op. cit.*, although it should be remembered that these authors accepted, uncritically, the letter to the Chartist Convention in 1839 which stated that the pitmen in the region were striking for the Charter.

<sup>2</sup> *Gateshead Observer*, 3 Sept. 1842.

<sup>3</sup> Two instances may be adduced of the local relationship between Chartists and members of the middle classes. When in 1839 a group of farmers and others was trying to obtain the closure of Cookson's chemical works at South Shields because of the nuisance caused by waste gases, the South Shields Political Union, a Chartist body, supported the chemical manufacturers, commenting, "However we may differ from the Owners of those Works in our Political Creed, yet we must express our approbation and acknowledge the benefits we receive, in common with our Townsmen, from those enterprising and spirited undertakings." Handbill in Newcastle Public Library, T. Wilson Collection, VII, f. 1496. A year earlier the Chartists had been harsh in their criticism of Cookson's, where persuasion and threats had been used in an attempt to prevent the workmen from attending the first major Tyneside Chartist meeting, Gammage, *op. cit.*, p. 26. Secondly, in 1840, when two Chartists, Devyr and Richard Marsden, had skipped bail and emigrated to America, the Member of Parliament for Gateshead, Sir William Hutt, interceded on behalf of their two Chartist sureties, Blakey and Horn, in a successful attempt to prevent Government from confiscating the bail money. Hutt stressed that he had been active in helping to put down the Chartist movement but told the Home Office that Blakey and Horn were genuinely repentant "of the folly they had engaged in" and that to confiscate the bail money would be "really harsh and impolitic". HO 40/55, 28 Dec. 1840.

Nevertheless little of importance came from this coalescence and during the following years local Chartist meetings were irregular in occurrence and ill-attended, with greatest interest in O'Connor's land scheme.

While in London and other parts of the country there was considerable concern about Chartist activity early in 1848, it was not until the beginning of April that Chartism was even mentioned in the north-east press and then only to give brief reports of meetings held and the situation in other parts of the country. On 10 April, the day of the Kennington Common meeting, the Newcastle Chartists betrayed their lack of connexion with the main movement, when they called one of their rare meetings, which considered only the repeal of the union with Ireland.

In the month after the big London meeting the old accord between middle- and working-class reformers in Newcastle reappeared. Large meetings were held there, as in other parts of the north east, to petition Parliament in support of Joseph Hume's motion for the "little Charter", household suffrage, the ballot and triennial Parliaments. During the 'fifties many ex-Chartists continued to advocate this programme, which was led by Joseph Cowen and the Northern Reform Union from 1858. 1848 was not the end of north-east Chartism. Small groups continued to meet throughout the 'fifties but they were never again taken seriously at a local let alone a national level.