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Feargus O'Connor: Chartist demagogue

James M. MacTiernan

University of Nebraska at Omaha

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FEARGUS O'CONNOR: CHARTIST DEMAGOGUE

A Thesis
Presented to
The Faculty of the Department of History
University of Omaha

In Partial Fulfillment
of the Requirements for the Degree
Master of Arts in History

by
James W. MacTiernan
June 1959
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# TABLE OF CONTENTS

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>CHAPTER</th>
<th>PAGE</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>I. INTRODUCTION</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Industrialism</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Factory Legislation</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Trade Unionism</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The Poor Law Amendment Bill</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The Problem</td>
<td>8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>II. IRISH BACKGROUND</td>
<td>10</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Celtic Heritage</td>
<td>11</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Arthur O'Connor</td>
<td>18</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Roger O'Connor</td>
<td>20</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Education of Pearses</td>
<td>25</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Youthful Adventures</td>
<td>28</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Master of Fort Robert</td>
<td>31</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>III. POLITICS AND RADICALISM</td>
<td>33</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Irish Discontent</td>
<td>33</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Whiteboy Activities</td>
<td>34</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Anti-Tithe Agitation</td>
<td>39</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Election to Parliament, 1832</td>
<td>40</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Loss of Seat in Parliament</td>
<td>44</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>London Radical Activities</td>
<td>46</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Development of <em>The Northern Star</em></td>
<td>51</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>CHAPTER</td>
<td>PAGE</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>---------</td>
<td>------</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>IV. CHARTIST DICTATOR</td>
<td>59</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Chartist Convention, February 4, 1839</td>
<td>59</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Physical and Moral Force Chartists</td>
<td>61</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Newport Uprising, November 3, 1839</td>
<td>67</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Imprisonment at York Castle</td>
<td>73</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Feud With William Lovett</td>
<td>78</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Complete Suffrage Movement</td>
<td>81</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Second Chartist Petition, 1842</td>
<td>82</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Plug Plot, August, 1842</td>
<td>85</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Chartism and the Anti-Corn Law League</td>
<td>86</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Trial of March, 1843</td>
<td>90</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>V. DECLINE AND FAILURE</td>
<td>92</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Beginning of Land Scheme</td>
<td>93</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Owenite Colony of Queenswood</td>
<td>96</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Break with B. O'Brien and T. Cooper</td>
<td>102</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Member of Parliament, 1847</td>
<td>103</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>End of Land Scheme</td>
<td>106</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Third Chartist Petition, April 10, 1849</td>
<td>111</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Insanity and Death</td>
<td>117</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>VI. CONCLUSION</td>
<td>119</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>BIBLIOGRAPHY</td>
<td>123</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>APPENDIX A. The People's Charter</td>
<td>134</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>APPENDIX B. Chartist Gospel</td>
<td>135</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
CHAPTER I
INTRODUCTION

Industrialism in England had nearly reached a stage of maturity by the year 1839: a railroad boom and an extension of laissez-faire policy would soon give it marks of middle age and prosperity. These would come in the late forties and fifties, during the period of the decline of the Chartist Movement; but before prosperity brought England a "Victorian Compromise" and fuller stomachs for her labourers, there could be heard during 1836-40 the loud rumbling of revolution. The mobs again stalked about England as they had following the Napoleonic Wars. While the "condition of England" was the leading question of the day, the platitudes of the Whig Government made the situation even more explosive. Thomas Carlyle, the elegant spokesman of the age, expressed the inadequacy of both the political economists and the members of Parliament. He remarked, "such platitudes of the world in which all horses could be well fed and innumerable working men could die starved; were it not better to end it, to have done with it." 1 Although the dominate groups of this period, the bourgeoisie and the landowners, did not stop battling for long over political and economic spoils, they did for the first time feel the acute pressure of another group, the hungry working men. They were not new to

the upper classes; a growling populace had been known since the eighteenth century when the enclosures began to toss farm labourers, cottagers, and some yeomen into the pot of the unemployed and unwanted. However, in 1839, when Chartism with its political facade became the pressure vehicle for the economic and social grievances of the working men, both the bourgeoisie and the landed aristocracy soon realized he must be acknowledged or face possible eruption. Although factory legislation, trade unionism, or modification of the Poor Laws cannot be directly attributed to the Chartist Movement, it is certain, however, that Chartism helped to fertilize the soil from which they were to spring. By 1848 the working men, not only in England but also in other parts of Europe, had established himself as a force which had to be recognized by all classes.

What were the economic and social distresses which gave Chartism a national character and historical significance? What were the conditions which drove the labourers into mobs and made them support out of their meager earnings a fantastically radical political program of universal suffrage and secret ballots in an age when the aristocracy ruled the nation with an iron hand? In short, what made the populace mad?

First of all, they suffered from disillusionment. After supporting the rising middle class in order to assure passage of the Reform Bill of 1832, the workers were inspired by the Whigs who promised a program of reform; but instead of a lessening of the working hours and betterment of conditions, they faced the defeat of Lord Ashley's "Ten Hour Bill." Instead of greater employment they were met by the forces of the "bashaws
of Somerset House” and the New Poor Law; and without an expression through trade unionism the workers were voiceless after the collapse of the unions under the pressure of the capitalists and the Whig government.

Before complacency replaced a genuine desire for reform, the Whigs, (led by Ashley, later famous as Lord Shaftesbury) passed an effective factory bill in 1833. The Act of 1833 appointed four inspectors to ensure that not only it, but all subsequent acts be obeyed. The bill dealt only with textiles, not including silk; it limited the hours of children under thirteen to eight hours, and under eighteen to twelve hours. This was, of course, the first real step toward stopping the evils of the factory system but was far from what the workers and the reformers had in mind. Their object was a “general ten hour act” concerned with the women and children. The Act of 1833 was a great disappointment, especially in light of the Whig’s cry for liberty and equality. Richard Castler thus expressed the disillusion: “After a good deal of back-stairs intriguing the Millowners and the government concocted a bill, and we are informed that it was supported by the Millowners because they knew it to be impracticable.”

As the country moved into depression years, the working conditions were not improving; in 1839, forty six percent of the 419,560 factory workers were under eighteen years of age and of the 242,296 females, 112,192 were

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3 Ibid.
girls under eighteen years of age. 4

The failure of trade unionism in 1833-34 was attributed partly to financial and organizational weakness; however, it was mainly caused by the pressure of the manufacturers and capitalists. In November 1833, the struggle between the working men combinations and the counter-combinations of employers reached a climax. In the town of Derby the manufacturers passed a resolution refusing to employ any member of the trade unions; when notices were issued, thousands of men became idle. 5 During 1834 there were strikes and turnouts in nearly all parts of the country; even in the agricultural areas. In Dorsetshire the government arrested George Loveless, a labourer and Methodist preacher, and five others of the Friendly Society of the Agricultural Labourers of Tolpuddle. After an unfair trial for administering unlawful oaths to unionists, they were transported to Australia. 6 The Dorsetshire martyrs became the rally cry for the trade unions and radicals until the beginning of Chartism. In fact, the system of petitions for the release of the martyrs was an important link between trade unionism of 1833-34 and the Chartist Movement. With the collapse of Owen's Grand National Consolidated Trade Union of 1834, most workers out of the vital law of necessity succumbed to the demands of the employers.

6 Cole and Wilson, op. cit., pp. 283-85.
The Unions were generally dissolved; thus another blow was struck at the labourers which was not evident during the years of fair income, 1834–36, but it was clearly marked when the depression and high food prices of 1836–42 drove them to seek any means of expressing their distresses.

The Poor Law Amendment Bill passed both houses of Parliament by a close voting margin at the third reading; some members of the House of Lords protested that "this bill was unjust and cruel to the poor." However, with the arguments of Malthus, who was championed by the middle class in the same manner as Ricardo, the Whigs set up the workhouses with Benthamite efficiency. It was declared that "our intention is to make the workhouses as like prisons as possible and to make them as uncomfortable as possible." One needs only to read parts of Charles Dickens', *Oliver Twist* to realize that this is what happened. The workhouses became known to the poor as "Bastiles." The arguments behind the law were justified to some degree; England could no longer feed her growing population, the poor rates were fantastically high, the law of settlement did keep the bourgeoisie from obtaining a mobile labouring force and the old Speenhamland system of subsidising wages helped to keep the workers living at a bare subsistence level. It can be said from a long point of view that the law was a step in the right direction; but when it became imperative that a man and his wife were to be separated for fear of further

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8Ibid., Vol. XXIV, 1834, p. 1098. 9Ibid., Vol. XLI, 1838, p. 1014.
breeding, the law was bound to create large opposition. The undaunted
William Cobbett exclaimed that the object of the bill "was to teach the
poor to live as man and wife, without having children. This was a base
and filthy philosophy, and yet a book has been published showing the
means of carrying the principles of Malthus into effect." The poor were
outraged by this demand and bombarded Parliament with petition after peti-
tion—to no avail; the government maintained its position and backed it
by recording that the poor rates had dropped from £7,036,968 in 1832 to
£4,024,471 in 1837.11

The new Poor Law of 1834 and possibly the Chartist Movement would
have been but a small paragraph in English History books had not the Poor
Law Commission attempted to enforce their system of workhouses in the
northern industrial areas at a time when most of the workers had neither
food nor employment. Following the bad harvests of 1836, England went
into an economic depression which lasted for more than half a decade. In
view of so much unemployment and distress, the system of workhouses was
unrealistic and wholly inadequate to meet the crises. In Leeds alone there
were in 1841, 20,936 persons whose average earnings were only eleven pence
three farthing a week. In Paisley nearly one fourth of the population

10 Ibid., Vol. XXV, 1834, pp. 221-22.

11 The Third Annual Report of the Poor Law Commissioners for England
and Wales, 1837, pp. 35-36, cited by Frank F. Rosenblatt, "The Chartist
Movement in the Social and Economic Aspects," Columbia University Studies
was in a state "bordering upon actual starvation." What was needed was financial aid, but the Commissioners dogmatically pushed their way throughout the north where they met stronger resistance. The protest developed into a wide spread movement supported by mass demonstrations. The Tory leaders, Richard Oastler and Joseph Stephens, had led the agitation to near boiling point when they were joined by Feergus O'Connor in 1837. It was mainly through this demagogue and his newspaper, *The Northern Star*, that the poor law agitation found its way into the political expression of the Chartist Movement.

It is possible to understand why Feergus O'Connor became the scapegoat for the failure of Chartism. His middle of the road position, his irresponsible tendency to overstate and overpraise, his contempt for culture and restraint coupled with flamboyant and exaggerated statements all made him an easy target for those who wished to find quick justification for the Chartist failure. By transferring Chartism from a peaceful and respectable agitation which William Lovett had visualized into a mass upheaval of the urban proletariat, by distracting the principles of the Chartist Movement into a movement back to the land (the Land Scheme), O'Connor had become the object of attack by the Chartist historians. Many of the historians writing about this period consistently point an accusing finger at Feergus O'Connor. E. L. Woodward denounces him as the

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"A ruin of the Chartist Movement." David Williams remarks, "the Movement's supreme misfortune was the leadership of Feergus O'Connor." Graham Wallas writes in his account of O'Connor's life in the Dictionary of National Biography that, "the absolute failure of Chartist may indeed he traced very largely to his position in the Movement." W. E. Adams states, "it is certain that he did more than any other man in the Movement... more probably than all the other men in this Movement put together to ruin the Chartist cause." After re-examining the events of this period it becomes increasingly doubtful that these men who painted such a black picture of this Irish demagogue were justified in doing so. Their dislike of O'Connor was mainly due to their approach to Chartist through the writings of William Lovett and R. G. Canning, both of whom expressed a violent hatred of Feergus O'Connor. This thesis is not meant to be an acting attorney for the defense of O'Connor, but it is an attempt to show what most people believe: there are many sides to every man, very few being born of the devil. It will investigate the background of the Irishman in order to determine some of

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the reasons for O'Connor's impulsive actions and will attempt to entangle from the many phases of Chartism the activities of O'Connor which show both his weakness and his strength.
CHAPTER II

IRISH BACKGROUND

When we look at the career of Fergus, it becomes apparent that there is an extreme lack of logic in both his physical and mental world. The paradox of his actions and the twist of his mind can be clearly understood only when they are viewed in light of the condition of the people from whom he descended. The main problem is that most of the studies of O'Connor have failed to advance account of his formative years and his early life in Ireland. The Land Scheme of 1874, a reactionary and romantic idea in a fastly industrializing England, makes sense only if we consider O'Connor's background in County Cork. Also we have to try to understand how it was that O'Connor managed to combine extreme democratic sentiments with undisguised aristocratic pretensions. His perpetual oscillation between the physical and moral forces of Chartism, and his proneness to use the language of the first and the policy of the second seem strong and erratic, but in the light of his family background we find a pattern. When attention is directed to the region of County Cork from which he came and to the family background he inherited, his life can be seen with greater continuity.

Geographical factors must have had a large unconscious effect on his outlook. The Bandon Valley, the place of his youth, was an isolated and unspoiled area with wild, wooded hill-slopes, and primitive roads running uneasily between the small valleys and scattered dwellings.
Undoubtedly living in this area helped kindle a passion for freedom, a hatred of restraint, and a lust for life that was boisterous, untamed, and spontaneous. An Anthony Adverseian way of life gave Feargus a passionate, undisciplined attitude, coupled with a dislike for that which was artificial, rational, and confining. Bandon Valley, being far from the hands of authority, was a scene of constant uninhibited revolutionary action. A taste for agitation and political horseplay in his early life must have had a profound influence on his interest in English Radicalism and Chartist.

In view of the contemporary denunciations of Feargus O'Connor as an infamous seven letter word, it is surprising to find that Feargus was of legitimate birth. Still more surprising is the knowledge that his father, Roger O'Connor, was a notorious lady's man whose offsprings populated various parts of Ireland. However, far from suggesting any low birth, Feargus constantly bragged of his descent from the Celtic Kings; notably from Roderick O'Connor, High King of Ireland in the twelfth century. Probably few people took this seriously, even Feargus himself, but he announced his lineage on every occasion he could, until it was so well known that Sir Robert Peel could joke about it in the House of Commons.

In his article on O'Connor in the *Dictionary of National Biography*, Graham Wallas, like so many other writers of Chartist, declared that Feargus was

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not of Irish pedigree but English. The founder of the family is described
as "a rich London merchant." Although it is difficult to prove that O'Con-
nor was descended from "Celtic rulers," it is equally difficult to disprove
the fact. To speak with authority on this problem would also be impossible
because most genealogies of the pedigrees cherished by Irish families are
bound by strings of tradition and legend. That Fergus, with constant re-
ference to his lineage, weakened his claim to such descent and caused him-
self to be ridiculed cannot be denied; but this does not mean the claims
were without foundation. In Richard R. Madden's book, The United Irishmen,
a great amount of historical information on background of the O'Connor
family is given. This information, which may or may not be valid, was
based on research done by two men—John Cornelius O'Callaghan, an eminent
Irish antiquarian, and Sir Bernard Burke, one time Ulster King-at-Arms and
author of England's Landed Gentry. According to Dr. Madden's review of
Arthur and Roger, the O'Conners belonged to the O'Connor-Kerry line of the
O'Connor clan, with its seat at the castle of Carrigfoyle, on the River
Shannon estuary. The ancestors of Fergus, however, called themselves
"Conner;" and it was not until the coming of Fergus's father, who also
claimed royal heritage, that the prefix O' was attached to the name. But
it was erroneously assumed by Roger as the lineage of the ancient family
of Pallengere, which was of undoubted royal line, but with which the family

\[3\] Madden, op. cit., p. 228.
\[b\] Ibid., p. 229.
of Conners of Connerville were not in any way connected. With the evidence at hand it is possible to follow the line of the Conners in two different directions back to John O'Connar, head of the Kerry branch, who was killed by Cromwell's soldiers in 1652. His family heritage is of an ancient and noble origin according to Dr. Madden's sources:

The sept of the O'Connor-Kerry descended from the illustrious line of "Ir," son of Milidh or Milesius, which sept is said to have reigned in Uladh or Ulster, from the Milesian conquest to the subjection of that kingdom, and the destruction of the famous royal seat of Emain A.D. 332 by the royal race of Heremon. Of this line of "Ir," which it flourished at Emain, were the champions of the Red Branch, as celebrated in our old Celtic story and song. From King Fergus, that reigned at Emain about the commencement of the Christian era, and from the heroine Meave, Queen of Connacht, the old genealogists deduce Ceir, the progenitor of the line of O'Connor-Kerry, whose chiefs were kings of Kerry for centuries previous to the Anglo-Norman invasion in the twelfth century. Soon after that invasion the dominions of this family were narrowed to the territory of Inagh-I-Conor. At the close of the reign of Elizabeth, they were deprived of the greater part of their principality, and the lands which they peopled for at least sixteen hundred years were conferred upon the then recently University of Dublin. Finally, in the confiscations under Cromwell, they shared the common ruin of most of the Milesian houses.

It was added that Fergus's father, Roger (1764-1834) was of this O'Connor-Kerry line because he was son of Roger Conner of Connerville, son of William Conner of Connerville, son of Mr. Daniel Conner of Temple Bar, London merchant, and afterwards of Bandon, County Cork; son of Mr. Cornelius Conner of Cork, who died in 1719, who was relative of the O'Connor-Kerry.

5Ibid. 6Ibid. 7Ibid., p. 228. 8Ibid.
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>O'CONNOR</th>
<th>KERRY OF CARRIGAFOYLE</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Cornelius (Bandon) M. 1670 Mrs. Joane Splane D. Sept. 22, 1714</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Daniel Conner Bandonbridge Merchant, D. Febr. 1761</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Daniel (Bandon) merchant</th>
<th>William, founder of Connerville</th>
<th>George, Founder of Billybricken branch of family.</th>
</tr>
</thead>
</table>

| Roger, ("Old") heir of Connerville. | M. Febr. 1753 to Anne Lonsfield, sister of Richard, D. 1798. | other children. |

|-----------------|---------------------------------|-----------------|-----------------|


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(Other children of Roger O'Connor, 1762-1834)

| Francois Burdett, went to So. America, 1819. | Harriet, tended Feargus in his last illness. | Roger, M. his cousin, Elizabeth Bunard of Palace Anne. | Mary M. Adderlly who became Mrs. Smuthvich. | Williamensia who became Mrs. Smuthvich. |
Dr. Madden's authorities point out the fact that the O'Connor Cork branch descended from one Phillip Conner, a merchant of London, who was of a parallel branch of the O'Connor-Kerry clan in England. The record of this fact was recorded in a deed of August 1593, in which John O'Connor, his relative, conveyed Asdee to the merchant, Phillip.  

From Pearns's comments on his descendents in the National Instructor of 1850 we have a clue to another story of his forefathers: "In the reign of the tyrant James my ancestor was burnt at the stake in Tralee in the County of Kerry... for becoming a convert of Protestant religion."  

John O'Hart in his book, Irish Pedigrees, claims that Pearns was blundering as usual when he stated that John O'Connor was murdered by Cromwell's men in 1652, which would, of course, make him a Catholic and an Irish patriot. Joanna, John's wife, was supposed to have fled across the mountains with her infant son to Bandon, County Cork. This town at the time was a Protestant stronghold, but it can be explained that perhaps she went there thinking concealment would be easiest where it was least expected. Here she changed her name to Conner. This evidence seems ironically humorous in view of the fact that while she changed her name from O'Connor to Conner in order to escape the lineage of kings, a century later Arthur and Roger traded it back again, but assuming the wrong branch of the O'Connor clan, the Ballensare

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9 Ibid., p. 229.
10 National Instructor, (London), June 7, 1850, p. 23.
12 Ibid.
Joanna's son, Cornelius, was raised as a Protestant and had a son, Daniel, who was the first prominent member of the Conner clan of County Cork. Daniel extended the family possessions after the Revolution of 1688 at a time when land was cheap and sold only to Protestants. Daniel also was styled as a merchant who lived for a while in London where he made a considerable fortune in the chandler business. He returned to Randon, County Cork (here the question arises whether he returned to Ireland or merely went over to Ireland) and became an active and prominent citizen of the county. William Conner was the second son of Daniel and the most well known of the group. He was a representative in the Irish Parliament from 1761 until his death in 1766. William was also the founder of Connorville which was located deep in the country on the road to Dunmanway, and a few miles west of the town of Ballyineen. It was a rich domain with wooded and pastured land and must have provided the Connors with an excellent income. It's hey day was probably in the second half of the eighteenth century before the Protestant ascent in Ireland was challenged.

"Old" Roger Conner, as Feergus's grandfather was commonly known, inherited a large fortune from his grandfather Daniel and gained control of

13 Ibid.
14 Madden, op. cit., p. 229
15 Ibid.
16 Ibid.
17 Ibid.
Connerville after the death of his father in 1766.19 Old Roger, a genial squire, was fond of sociability and was eager to take his place among the country gentry. With his marriage to Anne Longfield, of the Robert Longfield family and sister to Viscount Longueville, Roger obtained a high social position in Ireland.20 Previous to this the Conner family's reputation rested on an economic basis; now it had social standing. Anne Longfield had "stronger intellectual powers than her husband."21 However, both parents were persons of loose moral and religious views, thus setting poor examples for their children. By the time their children inherited the estate, there was considerable evidence of family disintegration. The first son Daniel, born in 1753, came into possession of Connerville during his father's lifetime; but because of an affair with the wife of a Mr. Gibbons, he was forced to sell Connerville to his brother Roger, Fergus's father. Daniel's love affair resulted in his being exiled from Ireland and assessed heavy monetary damages. He went to Bristol with the lady whom he finally married, and there lived until 1846 when he died at the ripe old age of ninety-three.22

When "old" Roger died in 1798 he left sufficient property to provide for his sons. "Young"Roger received Connerville; and another son, Robert Longfield Conner, who had already built a mansion about nine miles from

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19 Madden, op. cit., p. 230.
20 Ibid.
21 Ibid.
22 Ibid.
Bandon called Fort Robert, was left fifteen hundred pounds a year. With this generation the family split up both politically and religiously. Robert retained his name Conner and was a violent partisan of the Orangemen of his locality, while the other brothers, Arthur and Roger, replaced the Anglicized form of their name by "O'Connor" and went to the other political extreme by becoming champions of the United Irishmen. An unhealthy interest in politics and an abandonment of the old Conner policy of peaceful acquisition of land led quickly to a dissipation of the wealth that had been accumulated for many generations. As with the case of Feargus who spent what wealth was left him on the political agitation of Chartism, both Arthur and Roger went through their inheritance soon after they left their native domains to take up the political sword. It must be remembered, however, that the events of the day with its high excitement of revolution led men to extreme activities and views. The Orangeman, Robert Longfield, actually tried to get his brother, Roger, hanged for his activities in the United Irishmen.23

With Feargus O'Connor we find that only his uncle, Arthur, and father, Roger, gained enough prominence in history to deserve a place in the Dictionary of National Biography. One of the two brothers, Arthur, was by far the more admirable and he alone rose to national stature. Few persons question his sincerity and honesty of motives; but his generous support of the Catholic and republican causes in Ireland cost him the huge

legacy which his uncle, Lord Longueville, offered as well as his seat in the Irish Parliament. He was no skirmisher on the fringe of the United Irishmen movements; Dr. Madden counted him as one of its major heroes. Unlike his brother, Roger never wanted power for himself but would have liked to see Ireland a republic after the French model. His thought, in spite of being unsystematic, was at any rate more lucid than Roger's; and his pamphlet on The State of Ireland, printed in 1798, places him among the first to discuss the economic factors underlying Ireland's political needs.  

In the same manner as his uncle, the first work published by Feárgus was called, A State of Ireland, issued in Cork in 1832. It is apparent that Feárgus idolized his uncle. Tragedy hung over Arthur's career; not unlike that of many of the Irish patriots of the day. His trial for treason at Maidstone in 1798 was distinguished by the appearance for the defense of Charles James Fox, Thomas Erskine, and Henry Grattan. He was acquitted but taken back into custody on another charge and ultimately imprisoned at Fort George near Inverness, Scotland. Not until the treaty of Amiens, 1802, was he released; and then he had to go across the channel into exile in France where he was made a General by Napoleon and married the daughter of the philosopher Condorcet. There he bought an estate formerly belonging to Mirabeau near Meaours. There he died and left

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25 Ibid., p. 845.  
26 Ibid., p. 840.  
27 Ibid.
descendents. In 1832 he was allowed to pay a hurried visit to County Cork in order to dispose of his Irish property which had been badly embezzled by his brother Roger. In his later years he strongly opposed O'Connell's policy on account of its Catholic basis; for priest craft he had an extreme hatred. Today in Ireland he is a national hero, being more popular with the people than either Feargus or Roger.

More important from the point of view of understanding Feargus is the life of Roger O'Conner, for it was from his father that he inevitably received much, if not most, of his faulty character. Roger, who was educated according to fashion at Trinity College, Dublin, and called to the English Bar, began as a loyalist, joined the Musberry yeomanry, and helped suppress the Whiteboys (members of small rebel peasant bands). Under the impact of the French Revolution, however, he followed his brother's footsteps and joined the patriot's side. In the period immediately preceding the outbreak of 1798, he was the leading United Irishman in County Cork. Playing a somewhat two faced game, he appeared outwardly loyal but otherwise conspiring. Connerville was a good center for such intrigue, being situated quite near the coast where a French invasion might be expected. Roger entertained the British soldiers sent to meet General Hoche's expedition of 1796 but all the time he was organizing the peasants into patriotic Irish union. It is hardly surprising that he was soon suspected of

28 Madden, _op. cit._, p. 596.
treason. He escaped an arrest party and fled to England where he stayed until an amnesty was granted all who submitted. 30 On returning to County Cork, he was again charged with treason on the testimony of some peasants and imprisoned at Cork. 31 While he was there he did his best to acquire, like Feargus later at York gaol, the halo of martyrdom by writing accounts of his suffering. After being released from jail he again went to London with declared intentions of keeping out of politics; but as his brother, Arthur, had just been imprisoned at Margate, he was also seized and incarcerated in the same prison with Arthur. 32 He was released two years before his brother but not allowed to live in Ireland. He thereafter took up residence in London, and it was there that Feargus received his earliest education. In 1803, permission was granted for him to again live in Ireland but he still could not reside in County Cork. He then disposed of Connerville on a long lease and bought from the Wellesley family the great estate of Dangan in County Meath. 33 This was a typically foolish O'Connor move for it not only alienated him from the best part of his heritage, but also saddled the family with huge financial responsibility that it was incapable of handling. It was a grandiose idea which, like the Chartist Land Scheme, was wholly unrealistic. Roger O'Connor said that he wanted Dangan as a suitable residence in which to entertain Napoleon when he became master of

30 Madden, op. cit., p. 590.
31 Ibid., p. 593.
33 Madden, op. cit., p. 598.
Ireland, but the strain it put on his purse accounts for some of the subsequent tragic episodes of his life; like the fire at Dangan after the insuring of the property for five thousand pounds and the Galway mail coach robbery in 1812.

That such events are associated with Dangan affords a clue to the atmosphere in which Yeagles was raised. With subversive plotting in County Cork, imprisonment as a political agitator, and fraud and crime as means of keeping up foolish social ambitions, Roger did not set an edifying example. We suspect the future Chartist leader inherited from his father a large and miscellaneous collection of mental quirks. Of course, in the mail coach robbery affair in particular there is no complete certainty as to Roger's involvement, but it is more than likely. It occurred close to his property and, although he was acquitted with the help of Sir Francis Burdett, the acquittal may well have been a miscarriage of justice.

According to Dr. Madden there was always a lack of balance, an absence of temperance and moral scruple about Roger O'Connor. His oddities became more pronounced as he neared the end of his life. Like Yeagles he had great personal charm, and great gifts as a wit and story-teller. Some of his writings were works of excellent workmanship, but in the main they were typical of the O'Connor clan: a jumble of words produced by little intellectual effort.

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34 Ibid.
35 Ibid., p. 599.
36 Ibid.
The most renowned work of Roger O'Connor is also the most fantastic. The *Chronicles of Eri*, 1822, proposed to prove by means of documents that the pagan civilization of Ireland had been ruined by the advent of Christianity. It was a very elaborate book which is generally regarded as fiction. William J. Fitzpatrick in his article on Roger in the *Dictionary of National Biography* states that the "book is mainly, if not entirely, the fruit of O'Connor's imagination." 37

It must have been soon after the Trim trial of 1817 that Roger left Dangan. For the rest of his life he wandered about a great deal; finally settling in a cottage at Ballincollig, County Cork, with a peasant girl whom he called his Princess of Kerry. 38 He died in 1834. His will began with the words: "I, O'Connor and O'Connor-Cier-rige, called by the English, Roger O'Connor, late of Connerville and Dangan Castle. . ." 39 It is significant that he was buried according to his wish, in the ancestral tomb of the MacCarthys at Kilcrea, County Cork. They were the ancient kings of Munster, long since dispossessed by the English but held in honor by Roger O'Connor. 40

Roger was married twice and fathered a number of children. In such a large family Feargus spent his childhood without the benefits of sound parental guidance. From his birth at Connerville through the years in London and Dangan, until he finally settled at Fort Robert, which only.

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38 Madden, op. cit., p. 609.  
40 Madden, op. cit., p. 610.
came into his hands by lucky chance, he lived in a world of unrest and insecurity. Unquestionably this affected his general outlook and intensified his inherent restlessness and extreme romanticism. The Chartist leader was very much the son of Roger, an Irishman with ambitions bigger than his resources. Feergus undoubtedly could thank, or blame, his father for much of his radicalism, his fictitious verbosity, and his rebelliousness.

There is an abundant amount of material about Feergus O'Connor during the period of his life when he was connected with the Chartist Movement, but of his early years before he entered politics we have very little to work with and that which is available is none too reliable. Intuition is necessary to piece together the story of his early life. The major source for those early years is a disorderly and confused picture that was written by O'Connor himself in the National Instructor in 1850. This account, written at a time when Feergus's mind was rapidly moving toward complete madness, is grossly exaggerated and filled with romantic tales and thus often untrue and inaccurate. However, the articles in the National Instructor are not to be discarded for, if used with discretion, they tell us much about the man, especially his early education and the influences which molded his character.

Edward Bowen O'Connor was the first name given to the Chartist leader, but to glorify the family name, his father changed it to "Feergus" after the ancient king of Emania who ruled about the beginning of the Christian era.

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41 Ibid., p. 230.
With the passage of time Fergus came to be spelled "Feargus." Different versions exist as to the date of his birth, but it is generally accepted as July 16, 1794. This date is given by Graham Wallace in the Dictionary of National Biography; however, 1796 is the year given in The Times and the Annual Register.

The place of O'Connor's birth is easier to fix than the date of the event. A general misconception seems to be that he was born at Dangan, but actually it is known that Roger O'Connor did not go to Dangan until 1803. Although there is no documentary proof available, it is almost certain that Feargus, the fourth son, came into the world at Connerville.

His first school was apparently situated at Streatham in Surrey and was kept by a Mr. Finlay, "a fine, noble, independent fellow and great admirer of my father." The date is uncertain, but it could have been about 1801-02 when Roger was released from Fort George and came to live near London. It is understandable that Feargus was not considered a good student, for he was known to be more interested in athletics and "galloping about the countryside on a horse allowed him by his father." His next school was at Clonmel in Tipperary, very likely about 1803 after his father's return to Ireland with the restriction that he might not

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42 The Times (London), September 3, 1855.
43 See Annual Register, Vol. XCVI, 1855, p. 302.
44 The Times (London), September 3, 1855.
45 P. M. Z., Vol. XII, p. 245.
46 National Instructor (London), June 7, 1850, p. 23.
live in County Cork. This was when Connerville was sacrificed for the
Castle Dangan. According to Feargus, the next school was Dr. Leney's in
Dublin where he managed to stay for eight years before being expelled.
Judging from what he said of himself, it is evident that he was both a
ruffian and an idler at school. But he must have learned more and been
less frolicsome than he would lead us to believe. Although he never was
a scholar, he did acquire a veneer of culture. It was part of his skill
as a demagogue which enabled him to conceal his gentlemanly education when
addressing the working class. He could be graceful and superficially erudite when the occasion required. His writing, in parts at least, shows
some evidences of good reasoning and indicates a degree of education. Even
Thomas Cooper, the Leicester Chartist, who was well educated, was apt to
look to O'Connor as not entirely illiterate. He tells us that Feargus had
not "lost his relish for Virgil and Horace, at that time of day."50

Whatever schools he may have attended in Dublin, he did not finish.
Hence he was shipped off by his parents to Mr. Willis's establishment at
Portarlington, County Offaly.51 Here he was too old for much class

47Thomas Frost, Forty Years Recollection (London: S. Low, Marston,

48National Instructor, (London), June 7, 1850, p. 23.

49Ibid.

50Thomas Cooper, Life of Thomas Cooper (London: Hodder and Stough-
ton, 1872), p. 223.

room work so was allowed to spend his time in the open air following his passion for riding and horses. But once again he was expelled, this time for having a love affair with the school master's daughter. It is generally accepted that he later entered Trinity College in the fashion of the gentry of the time, but there is no evidence to either support this claim or dispute it. If he did attend Trinity, he did not acquire a degree.

About O'Connor's legal training it is possible to be more definite. There is nothing unusual in his wanting to be a barrister; it was a desirable ambition for both social and financial rewards. His own explanation of what made him go into law is, however, typical of his impulsiveness. He tells us that once when he was listening to the great Irish lawyer McCully, examining a witness, one of the replies struck him so humorously that he burst into laughter; thus causing the usher to silence him with a stick. So annoyed was Feargus that he left the court determined that the day would come when he would be treated with more respect by the officials of the court. Immediately he signed in at King's Inn, Dublin. Whether he did this immediately or not is unknown, but there is evidence that he went to King's Inn in 1819 with a sponsor by the name of Robert Ryan. In order to be called to the Bar, whether English or Irish,

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it was then necessary to spend at least two years "keeping terms" at one of the Inns of the Court in London. Just when Fergus joined Grey's Inn of London is not known, but he must have spent the necessary time "at the English Temple" because he was called to the Irish Bar in 1830. That he ever became a practicing barrister is doubtful, for it is clear that he lacked the necessary knowledge for success and it is doubtful that his reasoning was coherent enough. His greatest assets were his power of destructive oratory and his flamboyant verbosity. These abilities could account for his reputation as a lawyer among the ignorant and unsophisticated Irish peasantry. His legal training, more superficial than real, seems to have been used mainly on the several occasions when he faced government prosecutions. The fact that he could claim to be a barrister, however, gave him added prestige in the Chartist Movement. Nevertheless, we can say with assurance that whatever he might have gotten from his legal training, it is positive that he lacked the precision and rationality to be much of a lawyer. All that he procured from law was an ability to juggle terms, thus allowing him to pepper his speeches with a legal jargon that tended to conceal even the most subversive ideas behind a cloud of legal cliches.

There exists an interesting story about Fergus before he started his legal training. It involved some fascinating adventures to England. These, if true, throw a revealing light on his temperament. If it happened

\[55\text{Frost, op. cit., p. 172.}\]
at all it must have occurred after his expulsion from Portarlington and
during his days at Dangan. The date cannot be definitely established, but
it may have been between 1815-17. Apparently becoming tired of the dull-
ness of his life at Dangan, he and his brother Francis decided to run away.
With a couple of stolen horses which they sold at Rathcoole, they were able
to sail from Dublin to Holyhead. Once in England they made their way on
foot to Bath where their uncle Daniel Conner was living. It must have
been a rugged journey; proof that both Fergus and his brother were in
good shape physically. It does not seem that they called upon their exiled
uncle, but instead walked on to Marlborough where they spent six days work-
ing in the hay fields on Lord Aylesbury's estate. The novelty having worn
off, and with a little money in their pockets, they went off to London to
see their father's old associate, Sir Francis Burdett. Sir Francis had,
however, already been forewarned of their possible arrival. He offered
them fifty pounds on the condition that they promise to return to Ireland.
This promise they probably gave without hesitation, having had enough ram-
bling for the time being. Together they walked back to Bristol where they
boarded the flimsy ship "Greyhound" for a stormy passage back to Ireland.
Enroute the ship lost its mast and drifted about for a week at sea. After
the "Greyhound" was towed into Cork, Fergus and Francis decided not to
hurry home because they expected a violent scene with their father. For
a night they had "a very jolly time" in Munster's capital city. When

56 Ibid.
57 Ibid.
58 Frost, op. cit., p. 172.
they returned to Dangan, Roger accused them of disgracing the family by their irresponsible behavior; but it was all soon forgotten and Feergus assumed his usual restless and uneasy life on the family estate.

Although Feergus did not give evidence at the Trim trial during the summer of 1817 when his father was on trial for his part in the robbery of the Galway mail-coach, the trial afforded him the opportunity of becoming better acquainted with Sir Francis Burdett, who was mainly responsible for the acquittal of his father. While at Dangan, Sir Francis presented Feergus with money to stock a farm of his own on the family domain.59 Young O'Connor, however, did not take to farming and spent the money on the purchase of horses. To these animals he gave more time than he did to the fields and, if his own story is true, he did make some profit from the horses. Not only did he acquire a large stable with a staff of grooms, but also he entered them in the local races. Late in his life he commented that he "had been on the turf in a small way."60 His downfall came when he "backed a bill" for a friend, in default of which his horses were seized and his wonderful stud vanished from his grasp.

Soon after this, it is reported that he inherited a sizable fortune from an uncle.62 His benefactor was Roger Longfield Conner, the builder of Port Robert who died in 1820. Just when Feergus and his brothers, Arthur

59 Ibid.
60 National Instructor (London), August 11, 1850, p. 38.
61 Ibid.
62 Ibid.
and Roger, moved to Fort Robert is not known, but it must have been about the time of the uncle's death. Roger Longfield Conner's three daughters lived at Fort Robert. They were eligible young ladies and the inevitable happened. Roger married his cousin Elizabeth and Arthur, his cousin Mary. Only Feargus avoided the matrimonial tie; however, he must have had a strong love affair with the eldest daughter, Anne, because he was able to persuade her to bequeath to him her share of the property. This was the basis for the lavish claims to private wealth which Feargus boasted of to the Chartists in England. His interest probably increased as the result of the deaths of Arthur in 1828 and Roger in 1830. They both had children, but Feargus managed to become master of Fort Robert, a splendid mansion in Pandan Valley. It was in such a devious manner that Feargus, one among many in an increasingly impoverished family, became a landed proprietor. This was important because without Fort Robert to add resources and prestige he could never have established himself among the local gentry and become the representative in Parliament for County Cork, the event which led into the stream of English Radicalism. Unless we remember that he entered politics as a squire at Fort Robert, the Land Scheme, in particular, would be quite unintelligible. Quite likely the years spent at Fort Robert between 1820 and 1832 were the happiest of O'Connor's life. This was his

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63 Madden, op. cit., p. 611.
64 National Instructor (London), August 11, 1850, p. 38.
65 Ibid.
66 Ibid.
time of fewest worries, most congenial surroundings, and the years when he was least plagued by unrealistic ambition. He was in his element living close to the soil and, although he was never the farmer he claimed to be, there is evidence that he managed the estate well and looked upon his duties as a landowner seriously. 67 It was from Fort Robert that Faargus moved on to the stage of history, from which he would never return to the quiet hills he liked so well. Certainly O'Connor would have suffered less and enjoyed more had he not plunged into the rushing millstream of current events which carried him to such a strange and spectacular life as a leader of Chartism.

A glance at most pages of Irish history will reveal the warlike and rebellious flavor of its past. Certainly, at the time Pearsus O'Connor entered politics, Ireland was in one of her most disturbed periods and time of greatest discontent. High rents, short leases, and unscrupulous landlords were only some of the grievances of the peasants. For many of the peasants who were staunch Catholics, the greatest hatred was paying a full contribution toward the upkeep of the Protestant church in Ireland. The paying of church tithes seemed not only ridiculous to them in view of their borderline existence, but identified the Protestant church with conquest, deprivation, and alien rule. It was a constant reminder that they were a defeated people. Thus, it is easy to understand why the state had to rely upon force to extract these hated dues for support of what was considered by Irishmen an alien church and religion.

The Irish peasants were not generally cultivated or thoughtful men. Influenced by the pressure of material necessity, by the prevalence of absence of hunger or cold, more than by abstract arguments or mere political grievances, their discontent, like that of the English Chartists, rose and fell with the state of the harvest. Acute suffering was necessary to bring their wrath to the boiling point. But if the outlook of most of the Irish peasants was narrow, their immediate needs led them to more remote objects; they realized, however vaguely, that too little self determination was accorded to them and that Ireland as a country was not yet
master of her own fate. Pride in birth and soil supplemented purely economic difficulties as a cause of unrest. Memories and legends of the United Irishmen, of Republicanism, and the Rights of Man, survived even in the humble dwellings of the peasants to keep their patriotism alive and extend their range of understanding. The desire for agrarian reform and abolition of tithes joined hands with the demand that the Act of Union of 1800 should be repealed, and that Ireland once more should have a Parliament of her own at Dublin. Economic, religious, and constitutional grievances were closely interlocked with each other. Behind them all was the general idea, not clearly visualized as yet, that Ireland should belong to the Irish.

Such was the atmosphere of Ireland when Pádraig Ó Conaire took up permanent residence at Fort Hobart. County Cork was then experiencing, in a particularly intensive form, the problems which were troubling the whole country, for it was relatively backward in economic development and inhabited by a solid body of Catholic peasantry that, generally, lived in poverty. Revolts were prevalent and secret societies were organized throughout the country. The most important of these, the Whiteboys, first appeared late in the eighteenth century and underwent periodic resurrections as the need arose. The Whiteboys demanded lower rents and better security against eviction, but their aims were indefinite. They became very active

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following the Napoleonic Wars when it became less profitable to grow corn. A succession of bad harvests, resulting in partial famines, aggravated the suffering with the result that a new wave of disorder began to sweep over the country early in 1822. During the first part of that year, many nocturnal gatherings were held in secluded spots and attempts were made by means of force to prevent the collection of rent or tithes. The Whiteboys had the advantage of a close knowledge of the country and were so active in the southern part of the county that several leading Protestants were driven from their homes into the town of Bandon for refuge, while the alarmed magistrates hurriedly sent for military support at Dublin complaining that their available troops were too few and that "the whole district may be said to be in a defenseless state." The rebels who were well organized came into open conflict with the military on January 21, 1822 in the hills between Bantry and Macroom. The engagement was indecisive and although the Whiteboys became less daring and direct in their defiance, there was trouble again in the following winter.

It appears almost certain that O'Connor played a part in these events; certainly it is scarcely creditable that Pearseus, living at Fort Robert should have remained a detached spectator of the Whiteboy movement. Fond as he was of excitement and action, and with a family tradition to

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guide him, he would naturally be eager to plunge into the activities. In his later references to the Whiteboys he is careful not to be too definite, but it seems that he was actually wounded in one of the small battles. Whenever he was asked whether or not it was true that he had been, he would reply that, "curiously enough there was a burnt hole about the size of a bullet in the shirt of my coat. I had been smoking a cigar and some of the ashes had fallen from it; and, still more curiously, I had a sore leg at the time." 6 O'Connor went on to say that having received friendly advice from the magistrate about a warrant that was to be issued for his arrest, he hastened to leave the country. He traveled from Cork to Dublin on one of his fastest steeds and, after finally managing to get to London, he remained in hiding a full thirteen months until the trouble had blown over. Thanks to the hospitality of Major O'Flaherty, he was able to hide in a humble garret of the house at Number 4 Northumberland Street. 7 To support himself during this period, he turned to writing. If we can believe his own story, he produced at amazing speed a novel, a comedy, a farce, and two tragedies. The novel was called, The White Boy; the comedy, in keeping with his Irish nature, was titled, Bull or O'Full. 8 But the publishers refused to have anything to do with him or his writings and his brief career as an author ended as soon as he felt it safe to return to Ireland.

6 Frost, op. cit., p. 175. 7 Ibid. 8 Ibid.
Other factors as well as his Whiteboy activities helped explain his flight to London. His career as an agitator and orator also began about this time in 1822 when he delivered his first public speech and published his first political pamphlet. The scene of his speech was a little village of Enniskeen which was a few miles from Fort Robert. There is no copy of the speech available but it must have been somewhat of an explosive nature, for toward the end of his life Feargas wrote of it, "in those days I was not as cautious as experience has since made me and I think my speech did contain a little spice of treason." After his achievement at Enniskeen he attempted a diagnosis of the elements in Ireland in a slim pamphlet which he had privately printed in Cork. Rather characteristically he took his title from the work which his uncle Arthur published in 1798. A State of Ireland was, however, more in keeping in style with his father's ridiculous masterpiece, the Chronicles of Eri. It was "an almost meaningless composition," rambling endlessly in a true O'Connor fashion.

There is no further news of O'Connor's political activities until the passing of the Catholic Emancipation Act of 1829. The years that intervened were spent at Fort Robert where frequently he indulged in good cheer and gaiety. Feargas had few rivals as an entertainer; when he was


young he effervesced with life and laughter and had quite a capacity for mimicry and relating anecdotes. He was, despite his strange political opinions, a welcome guest among the neighbouring gentry. Few could excel him in facetious humour and infectious vivacity, and these qualities were much appreciated, especially during the long winter evenings. He was a good whist player and a charming conversationalist, reserving his explosive anger for the public. He could be elegant and dignified when necessary. In the open air his accomplishments were hardly less commendable for he was an excellent horseman and a keen fox hunter, both of which were invaluable assets in the region in which he lived. With brilliant red hair, Parnell must have been a colorful figure on the Irish pastoral scene as he followed the hounds on one of his fiery steeds. The color of his hair proved to be an important asset not only in social circles but also it added to his attraction as a mob orator.

From the quiet life at Fort Robert he stepped on to the political platform on December 1, 1831, when he appeared at a county meeting for Parliamentary reform held in the courthouse at Cork. The meeting was intended to be a Whig demonstration; the middle class liberalism asking for reform without revolution. The local Whig gentry were content to repeat familiar platitudes about broadening the franchise which the audience

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13 Deunt, op. cit., p. 229.

14 Ibid.
greeted with the usual enthusiasm. O'Connor stood up in front of one of
the galleries and made a typical speech, going far beyond the demands of
previous speakers, in favor of a full repeal of the Union, as well as
annual Parliaments, universal suffrage, and vote by ballot.15 The Whig
gentry scoffed at this threat, coming as it did from one who was practi-
cally unknown in the County and one not renowned for his wealth or in-
fluence. However, O'Connor's speech gained the loudest applause and
excited popular curiosity, and some called it "beyond comparison the best
speech of the day."16 From this point of his life until his death in 1855,
Pearegus constantly moved the masses with intensified oratory based on radic-
cal demands. In the summer of 1832 he began to speak at the anti-tithe
meetings; addressing meetings at Bandon, Macroom, L unnamore, and Enniskillen.17
Once he tasted the success of oratory he found it impossible to stop. It
was noticed by one writer that during this period of his agitation he addres-
sed the people more in the style of a chieftain encouraging his gillent
clansmen that that of a commonplace agitator talking down to the level of
an unenlightened audience. But the peasants who heard him were carried
away, like the "fustian jacket Chartists," by his fluency of speech and
his colorful and awesome appearance. They never noticed the lack of close
reasoning or the predominance of emotion over the mind. He had exactly
the qualities then demanded of the popular leader, especially in Ireland.

15 Ibid., p. 230
16 Ibid.
O'Connor was finally arrested for his anti-tithe speeches on September 8, 1832 but there was no trial or prosecution, and he took advantage of his situation by posing as a martyr of the cause as he would do again after his imprisonment at York Castle for Chartist activities. Finding himself with increased popularity, Feargus then declared himself as a candidate for the coming election to Parliament which was to be the first election under the New Reform Act for Ireland. With the support of Daniel O'Connell, who was anxious to send to Westminster as large a repeal party as possible, Feargus pushed on with relentless determination to gain a victory. "I traversed the country by night and by day in company with my old and esteemed friend W. Joseph O'Neill Daunt; frequently attending two, three, or four meetings a day, at a great distance from each other." It seems that O'Connor was just the man the Irish peasants were looking for; one who could satisfy their emotions, flatter their vanities, and not over-tax their brains. At the County election in December, 1832, Feargus was elected; defeating one of the official Whig candidates and amazing the county families who considered themselves to have a right to monopolize the seats.

It was not until February 1833 when Parliament assembled that O'Connor first took his seat. It must have been a great moment when he found himself set in the midst of the most select and competent society of the kingdom.

19 National Instructor (London), December 21, 1850, p. 201.
but he must also have felt rather insignificant. Like William Cobbett, he was never well suited to Westminster. He aroused there not enthusiasm, but indignation or amusement. He was essentially a mob orator, rejoicing in a vast and uncritical audience, drinking recklessly of the wine of mass emotion. His influence was based upon his willingness to identify himself with the crude feelings and prejudices of the masses. Listeners whose response was more sophisticated found him much less overwhelming. They noticed his lack of logic and balance; his arguments fell flat in placid and respectable surroundings. Although he continued in the House of Commons to reiterate the old themes, to speak for the Irish peasants and against the Irish Union, as well as to point out the antiquity and wealth of his own family, his oratory achieved nothing like the effect it had in the open air.

As part of Daniel O'Connell's "tail" he found himself a mere subordinate in the fight for Irish rights. It was not a position he could have relished. The breach with O'Connell began quietly, and superficially it could be seen as a clash of two personalities which resembled each other in their verbal violence, their appeal to the political underworld, their rugged defiance in language, and their largeness of stature. But the essential reasons for the split with O'Connell were fundamental differences in their political outlook and aims. Although Daniel O'Connell was proud to be called the "King of the Beggar," he had no desire whatever for

21 Daunt, op. cit., p. 264.
a social revolution. As much as he used popular feeling, it was always to
give strength to his advocacy of political reform, never with any intention
of overturning the class structure or seeking to establish universal suffrage.

From the beginning Feargus O'Connor had kept social and political changes
closely together and had been partly drawn into politics as a means of re-
ducing material suffering and social injustice. In his eyes the cause of
Ireland was bound up with the cause of the common people, and oppression was
not simply a matter of constitutional arrangement, nor was it confined to
one country alone. If he was a radical in Ireland, he was also a radical in

England.

As soon as he got into Parliament, Feargus began to side with the
radical group almost as often as with the Irish party. In the first session
he supported Joseph Hume's criticism of the window tax and Lord Ashley's
Factory Act, the first really effective piece of legislation in this field.
The following year he heartily sympathized with William Cobbett in his op-
position to the Poor Law Amendment Act.25 Outside the House of Commons he
became interested in the metropolitan radicalism and joined in with the
National Union of the Working Classes which was made up of intelligent
artisans who a few years later drew up the People's Charter. In March,
1833, when he had been in London less than a month, he spoke at a meeting

22 Curtis, op. cit., p. 360
23 Ibid.
24 Cole, op. cit., p. 309.
25 Ibid.
organized by that group. His special topic was the repressive measure
which the government had adopted in order to put down disorder in Ireland,
but this finally developed into a general condemnation of the Whigs which
was greeted with loud cheering. Although most of the speeches on such
occasions were intended merely to exercise his lungs, the contacts they
gave him in London radical circles were useful later when he lost his seat
in the House of Commons and broke completely with O'Connor.

The final break with the "liberator," O'Connell, came when Feargus
published his Letters to Daniel O'Connell in which he blasted his leader
for slowness of his methods. Thereafter, O'Connell pursued O'Connor with
implacable hatred, which undoubtedly, caused him later to hinder Chartism.
Although his hostility was hardly more than a nuisance in England, it
effectively excluded O'Connor from Irish politics and as a result, Chartism
as well. In spite of Feargus's appeals to the working class sentiment
across the water, and his tireless recapitulation of his Irish ancestry,
there was little response in Ireland to the program he offered in his
Chartist days.

Despite his break with O'Connell at the General Election in 1835,
it was evident that Feargus still had retained his oratorical hold on the
people for they returned him to the Westminster at the General Election
of 1835. His popular backing might have been sound, but his sharp tongue
had made many enemies for him in County Cork. To oust him against the wishes of Daniel O'Connell would have been difficult, but it could now be safely assumed that the Irish leader would, at least, stand aside if there was any prospect of getting rid of the most persistent and dangerous of his critics. O'Connor's vulnerable point was whether or not his property qualification was sufficient for a Knight of the Shire. The election was scarcely over before Richard Longfield, one of the defeated candidates, began preparations to challenge O'Connell's title. The petition reached the House of Commons in March, 1835 and a select committee was appointed to deal with it. On June 5, O'Connell's income was assessed at barely three hundred pounds a year and much of that was not freehold. He therefore lost his seat, and to avoid the delay and expense of another general election, Richard Longfield was put in his place. Feargus's political career seemed to have been suddenly cut off. A dozen years were to pass before he was again to sit in Parliament. The blow which cost him his seat also undermined his reputation in Ireland, more in fact, than his quarrel with O'Connell had. He was accused of deceit and of betraying those who had voted for him. Ireland shut its door on its red-headed hero, and he then focused his attention on England and its political arena of English radicalism.

The loss of his seat in Parliament must have been a severe blow to the ambitious O'Connell, but he did not lose a moment weeping over his

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30 Ibid., p. 267.  
so-called injustice. The adventure following his expulsion from the House of Commons was in keeping with his romantic character and the tradition of his family. At this time the Spanish ambassador in London was seeking help for Christina, the Queen Regent, against Don Carlos who claimed the Spanish throne. His request was received without enthusiasm in official quarters, but in spite of the disapproval of the Duke of Wellington, a British Volunteer Legion was organized under the command of Deacy Owen, M.P. for Westminster since 1833 who had served in Spain during the Peninsular War. The enterprise with its large element of daring and lawlessness naturally appealed to O'Connor who proposed to raise an Irish brigade which he would take to Spain as part of the British legion. However, he quickly gave it up when it was known that the death of William Cobbett in April, 1835, opened the possibility of returning to Parliament. William Cobbett's death gave rise to a vacancy at Oldham, which Fergus, as a steadfast opponent of the Poor Law Amendment Act of 1834, felt suitable to fill. This was, however, his only connection with Oldham. The official Radical candidate was John Morgan Cobbett, son of the great William, and there was every reason to expect that he would be returned. O'Connor's intervention, though he got but a handful of votes, was enough to bring about John Morgan Cobbett's defeat by a majority of thirteen. The Tory opponent, J. A. Lees, was elected to Parliament; thus, O'Connor's entrance in the contest was

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32 E. B., Vol. IX, p. 401
34 Ibid.
35 Ibid.
looked upon with much indignation by the Radicals. Certainly his selfish conduct did not help his reputation. After the contest the respectable artisans watched with scorn as Feargus left in a fancy, hired carriage bearing a large Irish flag, symbol of his royal lineage; but the common labourer cheered from the fields as the "redhead" rolled past them on his way to London. Nothing he did discredited him with the masses.

After his failure at Oldham, Feargus returned to London and sought a bigger part in the Radical movement there. At that time metropolitan Radicalism was in need of organization and a leader; it was strong, of course, in history and tradition, but it was confined to the fairly narrow circle of intelligent artisans who were inclined to distrust the labouring masses and to leave them outside any plans they might formulate. The National Union of the Working Classes never possessed the sweeping comprehension of its name, and it perished with the Owenite scheme for economic reconstruction in 1874. Its leading members, such as Lovett and Hetherington, were deeply engaged in the struggles for unstamped newspapers when O'Connor was thrown into their hands and they were no more eager to weaken their position by reckless appeals to the unenlightened multitudes than they were later when they formed the London Working Men's Association. Men who prided themselves on reasonableness, restraint, and sound political knowledge had little in common with O'Connor. It was, therefore, not from them, but from those outside the range of their appeal that O'Connor had

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to draw his main strength. Such applause was easier to obtain but more difficult to hold; it gave depth and power to the Radical movement, but it also introduced discord and lowered the standards and stiffened the resistance of the respectable classes to what seemed to be the eruption of malice and vulgarity.

The program which O'Connor offered for popular consumption was elastic and somewhat vague. He never hesitated long before admitting any reform, however drastic it might be, if enough people clamored for it. The central theme of the program was formed by a recital of what were to become the Chartist points with one of them, payment for M.P.'s, missing. Such was the general cause to which O'Connor, in the interval between his expulsion from Parliament and his adoption of Chartist, tried repeatedly to rally the proletariat of London. In a sense it was a pioneer task and he neither expected or received support from the more exclusive Radical circle which had hitherto supplied spokesmen and leaders for the inarticulate working classes. He seems to have deceived himself as much as others into thinking that his Control Committee of Metropolitan Radical Union and its companion, The Central National Association, were the main sources out of which Chartist sprang. Although his work never struck roots in London and was quite outside the central Radical tradition there, he liked to picture them as the enduring factors in the development and organization of working class opinion. To his Radical Association he

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37 Foot, op. cit., p. 267.
annexed much of the credit which was properly due to the London Working Men's Association and the line of Radical opinion which it represented. It is evident that Fearngus O'Connor utilized rather than created the Chartist Movement. Partly because his associations made so little headway against the growing confidence of the London Working Men's Association, O'Connor went on a tour of the north late in the summer of 1836. It was during this tour that he made the acquaintance of J. R. Stephens and Richard Oastler, leaders in the struggle for factory reform and against the Poor Law of 1834, and enrolled himself as their supporter. This gave him a cause to work for, but it also created difficulties, for both Stephens and Oastler were "thorough going Tories" and their views generally conflicted with the Radical outlook. By accepting them without sufficient examination O'Connor invited the charge that he was being disloyal to the genuine Radical creed and fostered the belief that he was prepared to say and do anything for popularity. His Tory leanings were not criticized until later, but almost from the beginning his methods did not go unchallenged.

Meanwhile the London Working Men's Association, in marked contrast to O'Connor's definite Radical Association, steadily developed. Its progress, however, did not satisfy Fearngus. William Lovett did not wish its membership to be miscellaneous or vast, and indeed, only sober working men

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39 Ibd.
40 Ibd., p. 89.
were eligible for admission in the ordinary way. As an intriguing mob
orator, full of reckless ambitions, O'Connor was inevitably out of place
among the intelligent artisans. He did, however, become an Honorary
Member of the Association. He was proposed by Robert Hartwell on Novem-
ber 15, 1836 and elected a week later. He attended many of the meetings
organized by the Association, but he invariably introduced an element of
discord. In the memorable meeting of February 28, 1837, the birthday of
the Charter, Feargus spoke only a few words as the "meeting had given him
a cool reception." The rift between Lovett and O'Connor began early and
steadily widened as it involved fundamental disagreements as to the aims
and purpose of Radicalism.

At this point O'Connor became associated with various radical mal-
contents who for different reasons stood outside Radical orthodoxy. Some
of them gathered around the London Mercury, a paper professing Radicalism
of the deepest hue, which was edited by John Bell and began its short but
active life on September 18, 1836, at the usual price of four and one half
d a copy. J. B. Bernard, A Cambridgeshire Radical farmer and currency

41 The Address and Rules of the London Working Men's Association for
Benefiting Politically, Socially, and Morally the Useful Classes, 1836,
p. 6, cited by G. D. H. Cole and A. W. Folsom, British Working Class Docu-

42 Julius West, A History of the Chartist Movement (London: Constable

43 Max Beer, A History of British Socialism (London: C. Bell and Sons,
Ltd., 1929), Vol. II, p. 27.

44 Novell, op. cit., p. 65.
The London Democratic Association of 1838 was developed as a rival to the popular London's Working Men's Association. This organization followed the extreme traditions of O'Connor's early abortive associations and proved not to be any more stable than its predecessors. The immediate occasion for its formation seems to have been a quarrel between Julian Harney, one of the most fiery of O'Connor's circle, and Daniel O'Connell, over the controversial question of Trade Unions. This was regarded by the association as a breach of etiquette. Harney was censored, which resulted in the organization of a rival body in which he could speak more freely. The London Democratic Association stood for social as well as political revolution and derived most of its support from the festering slums of the east end of London, particularly with the silk weavers of Spitalfield.

Fergus was prominent in the new association but because of its ferocious Jacobin aspects and because his interest at this time was in the industrial north, he never gave it much of his time or support; thus, within a year, the London Democratic Association collapsed.

With London the scene of several failures, and the school of Lovett in command there, O'Connor made up his mind to transfer his attention to

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45 Ibid., p. 66.
46 Ibid., p. 67.
the industrial regions, particularly Yorkshire and Lancashire, where discontent and turbulence meant that his peculiar abilities could be fully utilized. Thanks to his previous tours, he was well acquainted with the Radical leaders there and knew that the area had good potentialities. He had always attracted large crowds of friendly workers there and an ample measure of applause which he found so delightful. There can be no doubt that he enjoyed exercising power, but it is also evident that he was driven by a genuine desire to answer the call of those who were suffering from the result of economic change.

Under the leadership of William Hill, a schoolmaster and Swedenborgian minister, a group of radicals in the north had begun to collect a fund for a newspaper in the summer of 1837. Progress was rather slow, partly because the group supporting the project was not wealthy and partly because the necessary technical skill was not easily obtained. While plans for the newspaper were still in the embryonic stage, O'Connor stepped in and speedily took control. It was decided in the autumn of 1837 that Leeds should be the site of the new press and it was there that Joshua Hobson, a veteran of Leeds Radicalism, became its printer and publisher. William Ryder, another local Radical, lent both vocal and literary support; and William Hill himself was content to accept the subordinate role of editor under O'Connor. It must have required both skill and determination to develop an efficient team and get the paper started. O'Connor deserved

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48 W. cit., p. 36.  
49 Ibid., p. 87.
much credit for the forceful way in which he agitated for funds and support. With the usual amount of Irish bluff he gained control of the paper by giving the impression that he had plenty of money. He concealed the hollowness of his own resources by suggesting that the plan would have a better chance of success if it were backed by as large a number of shareholders as possible. It was noted that he received eight hundred pounds in one-pound shares from Yorkshire Radicals and a few small sums from Lancashire towns. He used this to pay for the necessary machinery, premises, and type: it is almost certain that he invested no money of his own, at least until the paper was thoroughly on its feet. The first issue was dated November 18, 1837, and it cost 4½d, the usual price for stamped newspapers at that time. Its full title was The Northern Star and Leeds General Advertiser. Under O'Connor's guidance The Northern Star acquired a national significance beyond the conception of the Yorkshire Radicals of 1837. Although it began over six months before the People's Charter was printed, and therefore had initially a general Radical program, it took up Chartism successfully and was long regarded as the central organ of the movement. This paper enjoyed a circulation and influence which was greater than any other popular paper, mainly because of O'Connor's personality, so intelligible to ordinary people, and because he was ready to write down to his readers.

50 Ibid.
52 Beer, op. cit., p. 12.
giving them what they wanted without trying to improve their minds.

For the "unshaven chin, blistered hands, and fusion jackets,"
The Northern Star became a secular bible. The following incident will help emphasize the importance of Feergus's newspaper in the lives of the working men of this period.

Another early recollection is that of a Sunday morning gathering in a humble kitchen. The most constant of our visitors was a crippled shoemaker, whose legs were of little use except to enable him to hop or hobble about on a pair of crutches. Larry—we called him Larry, because his Christian name was Laurence, and we knew no other—made his appearance every Sunday morning, as regular as clockwork, with a copy of The Northern Star, damp from the press, for the purpose of hearing some member of our household read out to him and others "Feergus's letter." The paper had first to be dried before the fire, and then carefully and evenly cut, so as not to damage a single line of the almost sacred production. This done, Larry, placidly smoking his cutty pipe, which he occasionally thrust into the gate for a light, settled himself to listen with all the rapture of a devotee in a tabernacle to the message of the great Feergus, watching and now and then turning the little joint as it hung and twirled before the kitchen fire, and interjecting occasional chuckles of approval as some particularly emphatic sentiment was read aloud.

It may safely be said that Feergus's career would have been much different if he had not secured The Northern Star. Not only did it serve in the hey day of its prosperity as a veritable gold mine, but also it spread the reputation of its proprietor throughout the country and encouraged the working classes to look solely to him for deliverance. As a source of revenue it was invaluable. O'Connor could not have lived indefinitely on the dwindling yield of his Irish property. From the

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platform of The Northern Star his voice could reach much further than even
the most ambitious of his tireless journeys from town to town. Although
at first The Northern Star was open to different shades of opinion, it was
not long before the reins were tightened and the paper transformed virtu-
ally into a reflection of O'Connor's thoughts on current topics. In the
later stages of Chartism, when O'Connor had to face strong criticism, the
possession of the paper was especially valuable as a means of defense. It
is difficult, for instance, to imagine that the Land Scheme would have
gone so far if the paper had not been there to advertise and explain.

As an orator of the first order he also helped consolidate his
position in the north by campaigning the causes of the "fustian jackets."
He possessed just the qualities that a superb demagogue needed. With his
massive frame, baritone voice, flowing red hair, and unquestionable elo-
quence, he stirred huge assemblies like no other man in England. Although
Henry Vincent was in some respects superior to O'Connor for indoor speak-
ing, O'Connor surpassed him out-of-doors and so gained a following which
was impressive in point of numbers.

The desperation of his followers was contaminating, and threats
of violence in his speeches became more and more open. Long before the
miscellaneous working class grievances were pushed into a common Chartist
program, O'Connor borrowed from Stephens and his associates a "physical
force" tendency. He also started a federation of local Radical bodies.

54 Havell, op. cit., p. 96.
called the Great Northern Union, which advocated a resort to physical force "in order to secure the equality of the law and the blessing of those institutions which are the birth right of free men." He was not, however, accepted everywhere in northern Radical quarters; the older Radical forces had been suspicious of his behavior and as his views developed, the cries of dissent and disappointment became more audible. O'Connor's close contact with Stephens and Eastler caused him almost unconsciously to acquire and relay Tory ideas which Radicals of the purest brand often found quite unpalatable.

The People's Charter was issued by the London Working Men's Association May 8, 1838, and it soon afterwards spread its appeal to the north. It was in the middle of July that the first mention of it occurred in The Northern Star, for O'Connor did not commit himself until he saw the direction in which opinion was flowing. But having seen this, he hastened to drop poor law agitation and factory reform and direct all his attention to the Chartist program. The change was not a great one, however, for there was little in Chartist which he had not already advocated. No doubt the real builders of Chartist, the London Working Men's Association and the Birmingham Political Union, were not at all eager for O'Connor's allegiance, as they remembered his strong impulse to dominate any organization he entered. As spokesman for the north, O'Connor projected into the Chartist discussions a much less sober and reasonable spirit. It was at the

55 Beer, op. cit., p. 13. 56 West, op. cit., p. 89.
Birmingham meeting of August 6, 1838, the first time the Radicals of England and Scotland came together under the Chartist banner, that Fergus openly presented a specimen of his fiery oratory. His speech then was almost absurdly violent, containing a singularly inappropriate quotation from the Irish poet Tom Moore: "fleshing swords to the hilt."^57

One of the most bewildering things about O'Connor was knowing where he stood in relation to the perennial controversy between the so-called physical and moral force groups with the Chartist Movement. It is highly probable that he was not sure himself. Speaking wildly without expecting his words to be taken too seriously, he seemed to have oscillated a great deal and refrained from committing himself irrevocably either way. An unsympathetic observer might deduce from this evidence a strain of cowardliness, arguing that O'Connor was a loud talker who shrank from the personal danger when action threatened. A more probable explanation, however, is that he was habitually carried away by his own rhetoric and, like many of his contemporaries, introduced threats without seriously intending to carry them out. He lacked the power to relate means to ends, to account enough in advance the consequences of his actions to govern his own conduct so as to make it consistently serve his purposes. He was always irresponsible, up to a point, and then he would draw back suddenly when he saw all too late where he was heading. "That he was a coward I find not proven, that he seemed to act as one to those who were called upon to act closely with him, is plain enough."^58

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57 See Annual Register, Vol. LXXX, 1838, p. 120.
58 Cole, op. cit., p. 303.
be remembered that a certain violence of language was typical in the Radical Movement at that period, and that a few years later an essentially middle class body like the Anti-Corn Law League could use threats almost as subversive as any used by the Chartists. 59

In the autumn of 1838 at the Peoples Convention in London, O'Connor continued to make speeches that were consistently inflammatory and reckless in nature. At Manchester in November he declared "if peace giveth not law, then I am for war to the knife."60 The torch-light meetings of that autumn aroused grave misgivings among those who knew what excitable and desperate mobs might do. Soon O'Connor realized that he had gone too far; at any rate, the arrest of Stephen, 61 together with the stern warnings of the Home Secretary, Lord John Russell, cooled his tone considerably. 62 On December 15, 1838, he mildly stated:

I have never said to the people so much as arm yourselves,
I never ever entertained the notion, and I still adhere to it
that the moral power of the people, if stretched to one half
its bearing, is amply sufficient to accomplish all they desire
to effect. 63

There may have been another factor behind the political scene which
induced a quieter tone into Feargus's speeches. Although O'Connor never

60 Novell, op. cit., p. 111.
61 See Annual Register, Vol. LXX, 1838, p. 169.
63 The Northern Star (Leeds), December 15, 1838, cited by West, op. cit., p. 97.
married or possessed much of a domestic life, it was noted that his pre-
ambulations about the country during this period of his career curiously
coincided with those of the celebrated actress, Louisa Nisbett, a woman
of great beauty. This caused rumors that the pair were to be married,
but the match did not occur. The affair, such as it was, was probably
a very warm one since it was stated that the actress, when O'Connor had
to be removed to an asylum, left the stage and nursed him as long as he
lived.

In any case, at the end of 1838, O'Connor had quieted down his
speech and exercised more discretion, not only had he been frightened
by Stephen's arrest, but also it was noted that his health was on the
brink of collapse due to the tremendous pace he set for himself. But
if he was tired from the endless agitation, he probably did not show
signs of it as he traveled to London for the long awaited Chartist Con-
vention on February 4, 1839. With a gleam in his eye, he undoubtedly looked
forward to a renewed battle with his opposition.

64 Adams, op. cit., p. 208. 65 Ibid., p. 209.
66 Beer, op. cit., p. 42.
If Charles Greville, famed Victorian diarist, was bored with English political activities eighteen months before the Chartist Convention in London, it was because he had believed that "nothing will happen, because in this country nothing ever does." Chartist's activities, however, quickly changed his attitude. On New Year's day of 1838 he commented, "as to public matters the year opens in no small gloom and uncertainty." On the surface of English life all seemed bright to Greville, but inwardly he was disturbed by the mind of the mass which was "discontented and there is a continual fermentation going on." Although Queen Victoria made no direct reference of Chartist in her opening address to Parliament, she had observed with pain "the persevering efforts which have been made in some parts of the country to excite my subjects to disobedience and resistance to the law."3

There is no doubt that many of the multitude of working men were excited and rebellious in 1839. To what extent their feelings would move them into open rebellion can be seen at a later date, but at the moment of the Convention they were, if not rebellious, an excited and inspired people.

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1 The Greville Memoirs, June 16, 1837.
2 Ibid., January 1, 1839.
3 See Annual Register, Vol. LXXXI, 1839, p. 8.
With the Convention came all the high aspirations of workingmen who looked upon the deliberations of the delegates as an inauguration of a new era of justice and equality. In the proletarian's confused minds it was imagined that prompt and drastic results would come from this Convention. The feeling of high confidence not only carried the mass of Chartists to extreme action but it also gave the delegates who were to present the People's Petition such an exaggerated conception of their powers and abilities that they seriously declared themselves as the only true Parliament of the English people. Some delegates wrote "M.C." after their names in the fashion of "M.P." believing they had sufficient influence to meet the House of Commons on equal if not superior terms. But excessive optimism was transferred into the most dismal disillusionment when the delegates failed to meet the demands that were necessary to make their program a success. It was soon found that mere noise and exhibitionism were not enough to bring about a change or cause the established order to crumble. It was much easier to talk vaguely of injustice at vast public meetings than to propose remedies that could be accepted without destroying social stability. The delegates could neither decide the means to be adopted nor the ends to be ultimately obtained. Much time was wasted with discussions about what action to follow if the Chartist Petition were rejected by Parliament. This, of course, Parliament was absolutely certain to do, for it could be seen in advance that only a small band of Radicals would be

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4Novell, op. cit., p. 125.  
5Ibid.
expected to cast their votes in favor of accepting it in full. What was the Convention to do then? Was it a body which was intended to do no more than supervise the Petition, or was it to adopt "ulterior measures" which were to be regarded as a preliminary to revolutionary upheaval?

From the beginning the Convention was split by the controversies between what was known as the "physical force" and "moral force" schools. W. Lovett and the London Workingmen's Association, the Birmingham men, and the majority of the Scottish delegates were upholders of the view that the Chartist agitation must remain strictly within constitutional limits and that there must be no attempt to gain their ends by force. Against this group was an extreme left faction which regarded physical rebellion as the only possible means of winning the Charter. Between them stood the O'Connorites who used the language of the latter and the action of the former. The distinctions between them were in fact not clear cut, but because O'Connor was a bluff, he was labeled by most Chartists as an advocate of physical force. The basic conflict between these groups was in their different planning of action to achieve the same end. It was not that W. Lovett repudiated the notion of an appeal to force. On the contrary, he gave his support to "ulterior measures," even to the extent of realizing that they might lead to civil war. It was not that O'Connor was ready to stake everything on a rebellion. This was very far from being the case, as later events showed. The real difference was between

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those who held that the method of working class agitation should be educational and rational and those who held that the governing classes would yield nothing except from fear, and that accordingly any and every method should be used to make the demand for Radical reform as formidable as possible. It does not mean that the Lovettes were prepared to postpone the demand for universal suffrage until the masses had been educated to use their votes——far from it. Lovett and his group did hold that, since the right to vote rested in man's claims as a rational being, it was necessary to use only rational appeals in arousing the people to a sense of their rights. It was not that O'Connor did not appeal to the notion of human rights. He did. But, for him, the right was that of the oppressed to shake off their oppressor by any means in their power. On the other hand, O'Connor was not willing to go all the way; he knew well enough that if he could not frighten the governing classes into surrender, he could not beat them in arms. But he did not begin to say this to himself until the prospect of an armed rising faced him as an immediate possibility.

The tragedy of O'Connor's position was of not having enough foresight to notice an abyss until it was immediately in front of him. No one, least of all O'Connor, knew until quite late in the Convention whether he was in favor of an appeal to force or not.

When Brontë O'Brien reported that the people were not prepared at all for an active rebellion or a "sacred month," O'Connor fully supported O'Brien, but not because he had reached a conclusion by seeing the

situation himself. O'Connor had known all along what the situation was: but he had not faced it until he had to decide positively.

It is interesting to watch Feargus O'Connor ride the fence between the "physical force" and "moral force" groups. His shifting attitudes during the session of the Convention present an excellent example. On February 4, 1839, during the opening speeches, he declared that the Convention would not be sitting if the people thought they could do no more than petition Parliament. During a public meeting at the Crown and Anchor Tavern on March 16, O'Connor declared that "millions of petitions would not dislodge a troop of dragons," and warned the delegates that they would "have a duty imposed upon them by the people" to do something more than present the Petition. But a few days later, when it was proposed to issue a pamphlet reprinted from articles in the Morning Chronicle in defense of the people's right to carry arms, O'Connor moved that the matter be deferred. In the middle of April he denounced as cowards and deserters the Birmingham delegates and moral force men who had already walked out of the Convention. In the same breath he said that unless the Convention "brought itself 'morally' in collision with other authorities, it would do nothing to show its own importance." As an alternative to physical or

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8 Hovell, op. cit., p. 125.
9 Morning Chronicle (London), March 19, 1839, cited by Hovell, op. cit., p. 127.
10 Chater (London), March 31, 1839, cited by Hovell, op. cit., p. 128.
11 Hovell, op. cit., p. 133.
moral force he suggested a general cessation of labour whereby the workers would "meet the cannon with the shuttle and present the web to the musket." On May 8, O'Connor moved that the Convention transfer to Birmingham where it would be nearer its supporters and out of reach of the arms of the Tory Government. At Birmingham he gave only hesitant support to the issues of the Convention's manifesto threatening "ulterior measures," but a short time later he proposed that any serious step on the part of the Government to arrest the delegates should be the signal for the adoption of "ulterior measures." Following this speech he supported a proposal to issue a strong warning to the people against carrying arms in public or creating riotous meetings. In June, at a West Riding meeting of two hundred thousand Chartists during the Convention's adjournment, he was asserting that he was quite ready to subscribe to the doctrine of standing by the law, "and not give our tyrants the slightest advantage of attacking us in sections; but should they employ force against us, I am for repelling attack by attack." On the resumption of the Convention's sittings at the beginning of July, O'Connor urged a return from Birmingham to London in order that the delegates might be at hand when Parliament debated about the Petition; and he also reported that his experience in the country during the Convention's adjournment had assured him that the Convention was not in a position to take a firmer stand, and to say to the Whigs "you must give us universal suffrage or we will take it."
Finally he supported the proposal to urge the people to immediately start a run on the banks for gold, to buy from Chartist sympathizers, and "to give up all excisable luxuries and to use their constitutional privilege of arming as speedily as possible."\textsuperscript{16}

Following the rejection of the Petition by the House of Commons,\textsuperscript{17} O'Connor dropped out of sight. When the Convention met in order to decide upon its course of action and a motion was carried calling a general strike for August 12, O'Connor was not to be found. On July 22, he reappeared. On this day Fronterre O'Brien made a long speech and moved that in view of the unprepared state of the people and the thinness of the Convention, the date on which the "sacred month" should begin ought to be settled by the people generally rather than by the Convention. Following O'Brien's speech, O'Connor moved an adjournment of the discussion pending a further meeting which all delegates should be urged to attend. At the adjourned meeting he made a speech full of pros and cons in which it was impossible to discover what he meant.\textsuperscript{18} In the end, he voted against the general strike. The record of vacillation easily showed that O'Connor only made decisions as he came to them and planned nothing ahead.

After months of random discussions the Convention adjourned on September 6, 1839. Without the weapon of a general strike it failed to create much pressure upon the government to change any part of the system.

\textsuperscript{16}Ibid., p. 126.

\textsuperscript{17}Hansard, \textit{op. cit.}, Vol. XLIX, pp. 220-256.

\textsuperscript{18}Gammage, \textit{op. cit.}, p. 147.
of representation. The delegates who were willing to take up arms in order to enforce their demands were quite small in number. Certainly they were in the minority among the delegates of the Convention, but the field was left to them after the futility of discussion and hopelessness of petition had been demonstrated. After the Convention broke up, the rebels quickly went underground to create secret committees and subversive plots.\textsuperscript{19} Details of these underground movements are difficult to find. All that can be said with certainty is that Feargus O'Connor was not a member of the active "physical force" group which included such men as Dr. John Taylor of Glasgow, Peter Bussey of Bradford, John Frost of Newport, and Julian Harney of London. It is probable that a simultaneous uprising was planned and that the seizure of Newport by the Welsh Chartist was to have been the starting signal for the rest of the country. The only result of this secret preparation was the disastrous Newport attack in November, an attack which was quite hopeless in its isolation and mismanagement. The reason the rest of the plan failed to materialize cannot be completely explained, but most likely the competent military precautions taken by General Charles J. Napier disheartened most of the potential insurgents. Obviously very few of those who cheered at the Chartist meetings had either the means or the desire to create a revolution. The English are generally known to be a quiet people without the French tradition for revolutionary action; they are therefore not very promising material out of which to create a general uprising. Even the most hot headed of the Chartist leaders must have

\textsuperscript{19}Hovell, \textit{op. cit.}, p. 174.
realized that if they proclaimed a rebellion, they would be generals without an army. General Napier clearly explains the Chartist's predicament when he says:

The Chartists say that they will keep the sacred month. Egregious folly! They will do no such thing; the poor cannot do it: they must plunder, and they will be hanged by the hundreds, they will be split upon it, but if they are made to attempt it they are lost. . . Physical force! Fools—we have the physical force, not they. . . Poor men, how little they know of physical force.

But the Welsh miners were made of tougher material, especially those from the south of Wales, an area where "the King's writ scarcely ran." It was not surprising that on the night of November 3, 1839, some three thousand colliers led by John Frost marched upon the town of Newport. They were armed in a miscellaneous manner, with guns, pistols, swords, pikes and a number of domestic implements such as bill hooks, scythes, saws, hammers, and pick axes. But the plot to seize the town and to rescue Henry Vincent, the leading orator of the London Working Men's Association, from Newport Gaol had become known to the authorities before the uprising. Consequently, the soldiers holding the town were able to break up the Chartist attack and disperse their ranks. The number of men killed was said to be twenty. Frost was immediately arrested and in December


23. See Annual Register, Vol. LXXIXI, Chapter XII, pp. 314-16.
sentenced to death. But the sentence was commuted to transportation largely
due to the fear of making a martyr out of the Chartist hero.

An explanation of O'Connor's conduct during the time of the uprising
creates one of the most interesting and involved problems of his career.
when the first shot of the Newport revolt was fired, Veargas was many
miles away in his native land of Ireland. Records show that he arrived
in Dublin October 6, and did not return to England until November 6, two
days after the outbreak. 24 His timely absence was, of course, condemned
by many Chartist bodies as an act of desertion and cowardliness. William
Lovett, the chief critic of O'Connor, was in prison at the time, but he
claimed that as soon as he came out, he made inquiries and obtained infor-
mation from a person who had taken an active part in it. 25 According to
Lovett's story, an account which major writers of Chartism follow, a meet-
ing was held by the chief Chartist delegates from Yorkshire and Lancashire
at Heckmondwike in late October, 1839. This meeting was informed of the
intention of the Welsh uprising and although several delegates thought
the uprising premature, it was decided to aid it by an outbreak in the
north. According to Lovett, a messenger was sent to O'Connor to request
him to lead them. The following conversation was supposed to have taken
place:

delegate. Mr. O'Connor, we are going to have a rising for the
Charter, in Yorkshire, and I am sent from—to ask if you will
lead us on, as you have so often said you would when we were

Fergus. Well, when is this rising to take place?
Delegate. Why, we have resolved that it shall begin on Saturday next.
Fergus. And are you all well provided with arms, then?
Delegate. Yes, all of us.
Fergus. Well, that is all right, my man.
Delegate. Now, Mr. O'Connor, shall I tell our lads that you will come and lead them on?
Fergus (indignantly). Why, man! When did you ever hear of me, or any one of my family, ever deserting the cause of the people? Have they not always been found at their post in the hour of danger?26

Lovett said that O'Connor's statement convinced the delegate that he would be ready to lead them, but when O'Connor found that the people were in earnest, he was said to have sent a message to Yorkshire to assure the people there that no rising would take place in Wales. Then he sent another messenger to Wales to assure the Welsh that there would be no rising in Yorkshire, and that it was all a government plot. When the messenger found John Frost, he was told that O'Connor's message had come too late, that Frost might as well blow out his own brains as try to oppose the people. Before the messenger could return to the north, the Welsh had risen and been defeated. The men of Yorkshire and Lancashire were exasperated when they found that they had been misinformed. Therefore, they decided to rise the following Saturday with Peter Bussey as their leader. Bussey, like his cowardly companion O'Connor, was not to be found when the time arrived. The failure at Newport also helped dampen the northern fire, for there was no rising in either Lancashire or Yorkshire.

If Lovett's story is to be taken as strictly accurate, the delegates conversation with O'Connor took place on or after October 26. But it must be remembered that O'Connor had arrived in Dublin October 6, some three weeks before the date on which the conversation is supposed to have taken place. Lovett's hatred for O'Connor was so strong that he sought to disparage him on all occasions. His story of the events does not hold up under close analysis.

Still less believable is the elaboration of Lovett's version that O'Connor could have saved Frost if he had wished, but preferred to sacrifice him out of jealousy. David Williams, biographer of John Frost, shows that "Frost would certainly have known if O'Connor had betrayed him, but his letters both immediately after the trial and twenty years later, show that throughout his life he retained for O'Connor's memory not only friendship but affection."27

In the opinion of G. D. H. Cole, eminent English historian, the entire event of the Newport uprising was greatly magnified by contemporaries and subsequent historians. He claims that the Newport episode was a small, isolated revolt which should be viewed in light of the region's past record of violence and revolt. Cole explained that in 1839 a great many people in England, especially in the upper classes, were expecting a large Chartist revolution. "When only the little 'Newport Rising' actually occurred it was natural to interpret it in the light of these fears; thus the largeness of

27 David Williams, John Frost: A Study in Chartism (Cardiff: University of Wales Press, 1939), p. 201
the expectation, rather than the smallness of the event, has determined its place in history." He further states that the only version of the story that makes sense is that O'Connor was entirely ignorant of any plans of a rising in Newport or anywhere else. O'Connor was kept in ignorance primarily because the extreme physical force men were well aware that O'Connor would not support their projects.

Whether O'Connor's trip to Ireland was premeditated or accidental, it was generally looked upon by Chartist leaders as a clever piece of maneuvering; it did not help his position in the Movement. But O'Connor lost no time in retrieving his lost prestige by energetically organizing the collection of funds to defend Frost and his fellow prisoners at their trial. He donated a whole week's profits from The Northern Star for this purpose and obtained the services of two eminent lawyers to defend Frost. He was also present in the court at Monmouth after the Convention in the middle of January, 1840, he was prominent in the agitation to reprieve the sentence.

The Newport rising of November 1839 and lesser troubles elsewhere determined the government to put as many Chartist leaders as possible out of the way. Fearns was naturally among those who were to be dealt with. He had early attracted the attention of those in authority by his unbridled oratory, the radical newspaper he owned, and the influence he exercised with people in the disturbed factory districts. General Charles Napier,

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the Army Commander in the north, kept a watchful eye on O'Connor and did not seem to have had a very high opinion of his character. Since May 15, 1839, he wrote that he had not anticipated an outbreak because "O'Connor wants to keep the agitation alive because he sells weekly sixty thousand copies of The Northern Star."³¹

Although Feergus gave the government authorities no opportunity to arrest him as a rebel, he did allow himself to be trapped as an editor and writer. Two issues of The Northern Star, July 13 and 20, 1839, were submitted by the Home Secretary, Lord John Russell, to the Attorney and Solicitor General. Their verdict ran as follows:

We are of the opinion that Mr. Feergus O'Connor properly be persecuted for these publications and that there is a reasonable probability of his conviction. It is clear that the editor of a newspaper cannot escape the penal consequences of publishing seditious libels, merely because the obnoxious matter is contained in an account of speeches delivered or said to have been delivered by others at public meetings.³²

Although the warrant for his arrest was not executed until September 20, 1839, O'Connor was probably aware of the intention much earlier. At the end of August two supporters of The Northern Star who worked at the Government Stamp Office announced that they were relinquishing their positions, no doubt thinking that the risk had become too great.³³ Feergus's trial for seditious libel took place at York on March 17, 1840. The court was crowded

³²Home Office, 48/33, Law Reports, July 30, 1839, No. 22.
³³See Annual Register, Vol. LXX, 1839, p. 178.
³⁴The Times (London), August 28, 1839.
and the case was heard before a special jury. O’Connor defended himself in a rambling speech which lasted nearly five hours. He declared that he had always supported the monarchy and opposed physical force, and then went on in his usual fashion to denounce the Whig government. The jury was, however, unimpressed and after a retirement of about ten minutes, returned with a verdict of guilty. On May 11, 1839, he was sent to York Castle for a term of eighteen months imprisonment. This was hardly an excessive penalty in view of O’Connor’s persistent attack on the government.

The Whig government was careful in all of its proceedings against the Chartists; thinking, of course, not to make martyrs of any of them. But this was exactly what Feargus had in mind. Immediately upon imprisonment he sent complaints to his newspaper, The Northern Star, as part of an elaborate policy of building up his reputation as the persecuted leader of the working classes. In a letter to The Times he announced that he was badly treated and was not at all sure he would survive the sentence. In such a case, he continued, there were certain surgeons who should be sent to examine his corpse. His conclusion, however, showed that he was less occupied with the idea of death than he tried to suggest. He wrote:

Sir, I trust that some one will ask now and then whether I am dead or alive, and now farewell, world—for seventeen months farewell; but, by Heaven, I’ll make a storm in you, yet.36

35 Geamanage, op. cit., pp. 175-76.
36 The Times (London), July 13, 1840.
The main agent for spreading news of his treatment was The Northern Star which gave an unreasonable amount of space to his letters. It conveyed to its readers the false notion that O'Connell alone was suffering for them. A stream of editorials accompanying his letters protested loudly against the indignities bestowed upon the people's leader. The laments were absorbed uncritically by many Chartist leaders and in many instances working class meetings were organized to protest O'Connell against unjust treatment. Men who would have been unmoved by theoretical discussions or abstract aims responded eagerly to stories of oppression inflicted upon the loudest and most eloquent of their spokesmen. They did not pause to question; O'Connell's case offered them something personal, concrete, and simple to demand. Upon him was poured a deluge of emotional loyalty; in him the bewildered citizens of the industrial cities came to see the personification of their hopes. They gave him a devotion which was essentially religious. He was the suffering servant, hated because he preached truth and righteousness, attacked because he proclaimed that the poor and wretched should inherit the earth. Hundreds of children were named in his honor. The Northern Star carried columns of birth announcements, such as: "On Monday the 8th, the wife of Ichabod Jenkins, nailer, was delivered of a fine thriving boy, who was christened Feargus O'Connell Ichabod." 37 The secret of the colossal popular following was as Margaret Cole suggested: "He appeared in light of a symbolic figure, the summation of the working class ideas

37 The Northern Star (Leeds), October 10, 1840, cited by Daunt, op. cit., p. 263.
at the very early stage of their modern development; he was looked upon as a Moses capable of leading his children out of the wilderness and into the land of promise. "O'Connor's life in prison, if we consider his words, was sheer torture; but in light of the treatment of other Chartist leaders, it was not so bad. He was allowed visitors and was not made subject to the general rules of the gaol. Certainly his pen was in constant use, and it was this writing freedom which kept him influential with the "fustian jackets" in spite of his confinement. Whereas legal proceedings silenced and removed all of his serious rivals in the affection of the Chartists, they enabled him to pose as a martyr and to make himself heard with less opposition than ever before. His voice alone could be heard.

After the Chartist's defeat in 1839, and the subsequent imprisonment of the leaders, it looked like Chartism was a thing of the past. Thomas Attwood and his followers dropped out, followed by the Scottish Chartists who formed a moral force organization of their own. Most of the leaders in prison were reluctant to carry on the Chartist agitation as a political pressure movement. With plenty of time for reflection, they worked on all sorts of ideas for the reorganization of the movement. Out of their efforts came abortive Chartist leagues which carried such titles as Teetotaller Chartism, Biblical Chartism, and Educational Chartism. William Lovett, released in 1840, put all of his energy into the development of Educational Chartism. Under his elaborate plans came the National Association of the

39 See Annual Register, Vol. IXXXIII, p. 2.
United Kingdom for Promoting the Political and Social Improvement of the People. While in prison Henry Vincent concluded that all the Chartists must be Teetotallers. His followers believed that "Teetotalism leads to knowledge—knowledge leads to thinking—thinking leads to discontent of things as they are, and then, as a matter of course, comes Chartist." Biblical Chartism was started by John Collins and supported by Bronterre O'Brien and William Hill. Another scheme for reorganization involved foreign aid. A memorial was drafted to the President of the United States, asking for his intercession on behalf of the "industrious and deeply insulted and injured classes of this country" and to help forward the charter.

Feargus lost no time in voicing opposition to any plans to compromise the Chartist agitation. Against these new organizations and any thing else that would attract attention from the Charter he fought with such words as these:

Do not think of Reform of the Lords—of sponsoring the National Debt—of repealing the Corn Laws—of Free Trade—of purifying the Church—mind none of them; for your United force could not effect any of these questions a pin's point, while your interference would weaken your power of laying the axe to the root of one and all.

Curiously enough O'Connor developed his own ideas on reorganizing Chartism while he served his sentence at York Castle. The seeds of his

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40 West, op. cit., p. 151-52.
42 Ibid., May 24, 1840.
43 Ibid., April 25, 1840.
Land Scheme were cast at this time. In a series of letters to Irish landlords he advised them to abandon large scale farming and allocate portions of their estates to peasant holdings. The Land Scheme did not evolve until after the failure of the second Chartist Petition, but it is evident that Feargus, like the other leaders, felt the same urgent need for reorganization. As a matter of fact, he developed another scheme which required a general subscription to support a new Chartist daily newspaper. Out of the profits of this paper, lecturers and delegates would be paid. O'Connor was always aware of the importance of propaganda, and he was never fully satisfied with his weekly paper, The Northern Star. He submitted his plan to the National Charter Association which was founded in Manchester in July, 1840, by a delegate conference. They rejected his scheme and developed their organization along a local structure where "classes" of ten each under a leader, combined into wards and then into larger units. The main policy of the National Charter Association consisted of running "hustings candidates" at elections and attending Corn Law repeal meetings with design to favor the Charter. From 1840 onwards the National Charter Association was the main Chartist organization. Although this Association did not accept his plan, it was made up of followers of the Irish demagogue. Feargus did not serve on its executive council until much later in his career, but it is evident that from the beginning he controlled the Association from behind the scenes. With the departure of most of the other Chartist leaders from the movement following the imprisonments of

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44 Cole and Filson, op. cit., pp. 374-80.
1839, O'Connor was left an open field in which to utilize his great persuasive powers over the proletariat. There is no doubt that he was a power-hungry demagogue who did everything possible to put the movement under his thumb. But it must be remembered when criticizing him for his dictatorship of the movement, that all the leaders undoubtedly helped put him into the position by their vacillation and unwillingness to lead the Chartists themselves. He became a dictator through the strength and drive of his personality, but equally important to his success was the failure of the other leaders to live up to their responsibilities.

O'Connor and Lovett had been rivals in the movement from the beginning, but at this stage of Chartism, their feud reached a boiling point. Lovett started his Educational Chartist organization in London in the spring of 1841. This move by Lovett provoked the most uncompromising opposition from O'Connor who accused him of sowing disunity.\textsuperscript{45} In the columns of The Northern Star Lovett's organization was labeled the "new move," a selfish and humbugging scheme developed by the "rats escaping from the trap."\textsuperscript{46} Lovett's case was taken up by Leeds Times, a neighbour and rival of The Northern Star. Samuel Smiles, editor of the paper, had great admiration for Lovett and once offered him a job on the paper.\textsuperscript{47} But Lovett, in his retiring and ascetic manner, slowly retreated from the main stream of Chartism without causing much opposition to O'Connor.

\textsuperscript{45}\textit{The Northern Star} (Leeds), May 1, 1841, cited by Hovell, \textit{op. cit.}, p. 235.

\textsuperscript{46}Ibid.

\textsuperscript{47}Lovett, \textit{op. cit.}, p. 245.
He had little sympathy for the Irishman and cared little what happened to Chartism under the direction of O'Connor.

The Chartist idol never served out his full sentence. On August 30, 1841, he was released on medical grounds with two and a half months to go. His emergence was greeted with much excitement by the Chartist, a number of whom were sent as delegates to York Castle to organize a procession in celebration of the joyful event. In a suit of beautiful velvet, a gift from Manchester operatives, the liberated hero paraded through the town of York in a triumphal carriage drawn by six horses. The procession led to a public meeting, at which O'Connor spoke. According to The Northern Star, between twenty thousand and thirty thousand people were present; however, The Times arrived at the modest estimate of one thousand to two thousand. O'Connor's release stimulated Radical activity throughout the country. Meetings were reported in such widely separated towns as Carlisle, Newport, Cheltenham, Leicester, Preston, and Glasgow. With herculean vitality, Feargus jumped back into the agitation for the Charter. He used his newly acquired freedom to make another tour of the country, no doubt thoroughly enjoying himself, for he loved the excitement and applause. London, Sheffield, Birmingham, Manchester, Oldham, Halifax, and Glasgow were among the many places which he enlivened by his presence. Wherever he went, he

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48 The Times (London), August 31, 1841.
49 The Northern Star (Leeds), August 31, 1841.
50 The Times (London), September 4, 1841.
51 Ibid.
brought in recruits and the rejuvenation which ensued was very valuable at a time when Chartist forces were at low numbers. After his release from jail the National Charter Association increased its agitation and organized the signing of another petition. It was through the immense activities of O'Connor that Chartistism reached its highest point in numbers. The Second Petition was signed by 3,315,752 persons, showing an increase of nearly one hundred sixty per cent over the supporters of the Chartist Petition of 1839.  

Undoubtedly Pearsus converted Chartistism from a set of impersonal demands to loyalty to a single individual, but, in another sense, his dictatorship was vitally important. Something emotional and dramatic was necessary to enlist the energies of the working class; he had these essential qualities. His movement was not edifying in view of Lovett's idealism, but at least, it saved Chartistism from becoming a grab bag of miscellaneous grievances. No doubt O'Connor was often inconsistent and twisted the truth to suit his purpose, but he did revive and consolidate the Chartist cause. In his study of Chartism, Preston W. Slosoon points out: "The real question of growth and decline of Chartistism is the question of varying amounts of popular support afforded to the organization and its leaders. 53 Poplar support for the movement generally followed the rise and fall of economic well being, but it must also be recognized that the

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flamboyant O'Connell did more than any other person to attract the multitudes to Chartism.

Among the early threats to his leadership, Lovett and company were not particularly dangerous. Far more challenging to O'Connell's leadership was the attempted reconciliation between middle and working class radicalism which was known as the Complete Suffrage Movement. This was originated as a pacifying gesture by the Birmingham Quaker and corn miller, Joseph Sturge. Among its program rallied many of those Chartists who resented or were dissatisfied with O'Connell's dictatorial methods. Lovett, O'Brien, and Hetherington followed along with a galaxy of middle class supporters, many of them drawn from the Anti-Corn League. Fergus regarded this organization as not only a threat to his leadership, but also an attempt to distract attention from the Charter and to use the reforming zeal of the workers as ammunition in the interest of another class as it had been used to win the Reform Act of 1832. In spite of the genuine good will of its promoters, this criticism had some qualifications, but O'Connell went too far with his attack on the movement when he charged Sturge with taking Chartists into his league because he had a vested interest as a banker and corn merchant. When a Complete Suffrage Conference was summoned at Birmingham in April, 1842, O'Connell ordered a rival Chartist Conference to meet at

54 Cole and Filson, op. cit., pp. 381-89.
56 Ibid.
London at the same time, hoping thereby to show how distinct and antagonistic the two movements were. He continued without mitigation his radical policy of refusing middle class help, arguing that its price would be the denial of the real interests and needs of the working classes. It is said that the "Complete Suffrage Party was wrecked by Fergus O'Connore." No doubt he had a large share in its destruction; but it is evident that the movement perished from internal disintegration rather than external pressure. Ironically enough, Lovett, the old enemy of O'Connor, joined with the Irish leader to cause the movement's final collapse.

Meanwhile, O'Connor's main efforts were directed toward the preparation and presentation of the second great Chartist Petition. As in 1839 a Convention was elected to hand over the petition. It met in London in April, 1842. This Convention, like its predecessor, was not very satisfactory, for it could find very little to do except waste time in futile internal dissensions and in discussions of irrelevant topics like temperance and cooperation as social movements. O'Connor spoke little, but on the few occasions that he took the stand, he merely continued his attack on the Complete Suffrage group and all who sympathized with it. After a few days the Convention dissolved, but the Petition, equipped with over three million signatures, came before the House of Commons in May.

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57 Hammond, op. cit., p. 277.  
58 Gamman, op. cit., pp. 242-43.  
Expectations still ran high for its acceptance, and O'Connor had recklessly spread optimism with articles in The Northern Star. The Petition was introduced in the House of Commons by T. S. Duncombe (member for Finsborg and consistent upholder of popular interest) in a speech pleading consideration for the Charter in view of its inherited Radical tradition. John A. Roebuck, a Radical who had helped draw up the people's Charter, was naturally in favor of the Petition, but he tried to fortify his case by disassociating both himself and the essence of Chartism from the "cowardly and malignant demagogue" who had been mainly responsible for the organization of the Petition. His attack on O'Connor proved ruinous to the case because it provoked Lord John Russell to retort that if such was the character of the outstanding Chartist leader, it did not speak well for the judgment and reliability of the masses. If their Petition were granted, might they be represented by the said demagogue in Parliament? Lord Russell seems to have forgotten that Feargus was a Member of Parliament following the Reform Bill of 1832. The Roebuck's blunder enabled the Petition to be dismissed with even less diversion than was inevitable. Once again Chartist hopes were smashed! O'Connor, who was in the gallery at the time, was greatly incensed against his outspoken assailant who apparently evaded a duel only by discounting the obvious implication of his remark.

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62 See Annual Register, Vol. LXXXIV, 1842, pp. 152-60.
63 National Instructor (London), December 13, 1850, p. 312.
Perhaps O'Connor had never believed in all that he handed out to his followers: it is difficult to assume that he really expected the Petition would be effective. He never looked far ahead, being contented with the moment. Whatever his real hopes may have been, they must have been bruised by the outcome of the Petition. What was he to do? In which direction should he lead his followers after the failure of two monster Petitions? Characteristically, he floundered about, grasping for any rope with which he could save his drowning organization. First of all, he changed his tune about the Complete Suffragists. In fact, he embarrassed Joseph Sturge (who, in August, was standing for Nottingham as Complete Suffrage candidate against John Walter of The Times) by speaking for him and lauding him to the skies as a true friend of the people. Secondly, O'Connor tried to unite the interests of trade unionism and Chartism. The Northern Star, relocated in London, became largely an organ of the working men's societies, especially the National Association of United Trades for the Protection of Labour. Thirdly, he began to work out plans for an experiment in cooperative ownership of land. This last effort led him to the development of the Land Scheme.

Meanwhile, after the defeat of the Petition, but before the Land Scheme, O'Connor became involved with the so called "Plug Plot" or great

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64 The Times (London), August 5, 1842.
65 West, op. cit., p. 200.
66 Cole and Filson, op. cit., pp. 391-94.
labour strikes which spread over the north and midlands in August, 1842. The immediate cause of the strikes was widespread wage reduction enforced by the employers. This reduction was answered by "turn outs" of workers who marched from factory to factory knocking out the boiler plugs so as to make work impossible. The Chartists as a body had nothing to do with bringing them about, but the question of using the strike to further the Charter's cause immediately was taken up by the National Charter Association. Should the strike be turned into a political demonstration to be continued until the Charter was made law, or should it be allowed to wear itself out without Chartist intervention? P. M. MacDovall, the Chartist Executive, was in favor of utilizing the strikes. A Chartist conference hurriedly assembled at Manchester to decide the issue. Feargus, who was not a member of the Executive at the time, declared himself in opposition to the strike. According to O'Connor, the Anti-Corn Law League not only caused the outbreak, "but further that they promoted it with an intention of driving the people to acts of violence and outrage, in hope of compelling the government by force to repeal the Corn Law." But finding himself in the minority at the conference, Feargus swung around and voted for a general Chartist strike. A Chartist Manifesto was issued, but it warned the strikers against the use of violence in a soothing tone which labeled the strike "a universal holiday." O'Connor continued to follow up the

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67 See Annual Register, Vol. LXXXIV, 1842, p. 133.
69 Gammage, op. cit., p. 218.
program of non-violence with a public letter printed in The Times: "Let no blood be shed. Let no life be destroyed. Let no property be consumed. Let us, in God's name, set an example to the world of what moral power is capable of effecting."\textsuperscript{70}

Generally the strikes were carried on with a minimum of rioting, but the penniless men could not hope to conduct a general strike unless they could turn it into an insurrection. For this maneuver they were unprepared, both physically and morally. Slowly the strikers drifted back to work during late August and early September without gaining their aims or compromising on the wage scale with their employers. Meanwhile, as the government proceeded to round up the leaders of the "Plug Flot," O'Connor could be heard blaming MacDouall, who had fled to France, for the responsibility of leading the people astray.\textsuperscript{71} O'Connor was, of course, among the leaders apprehended by the authorities. As a final result of the strike, fifty four persons were sentenced to various terms of imprisonment.\textsuperscript{72} O'Connor was released on bail to await a trial which was delayed until March, 1843.

Although MacDouall was made the immediate scapegoat for the failure of the strike, O'Connor did not hesitate long in renewing his attack on the Anti-Corn Law League. Since the League's birth in 1836, the Chartists, led by O'Brien and O'Connor, had regarded it as a "natural enemy." From

\textsuperscript{70}The Times (London), August 22, 1842.

\textsuperscript{71}The Northern Star (Leeds), December 10, 1842, cited by Novell, op. cit., p. 263.

\textsuperscript{72}See Annual Register, Vol. LXXXIV, 1842, p. 163.
1841 to 1844 there was hardly a free trade meeting at which the Chartists were not also present in order to move amendments to the free trade resolutions and to call upon the audiences to work first of all for the Charter. Feargus regarded the League as a bourgeois device activated by a desire to lower wages and to draw off support from the Chartist Movement. He further argued:

Every approval towards a union with the Corn Law League must be regarded as a direct step towards a betrayal of the Chartist cause; and that every public meeting which neglects to affirm the adoption of the People's Charter as the only remedy for the distresses of the people must be considered as compromising the great right of the working class to a share in the making of the laws. 73

But Feargus was against free trade for other reasons. He hated the Whigs with a passion and was almost willing to champion the agricultural interests against them. Certainly the Chartist support helped the Tories gain an election victory in 1841. It must also be remembered that, although Richard Cobden and John Bright were Radicals in the House of Commons, they opposed factory legislation and thus were distrusted by the majority of industrial Chartists. It is also probable that O'Connor's Land Scheme added fuel to his animosity toward the free traders. He would naturally fear the effect of foreign competition upon his agricultural venture.

The feud between these political pressure groups caused much personal hostility between O'Connor and Cobden. O'Connor had several times challenged Cobden to meet him in a public debate and such a meeting was finally arranged

73 The Northern Star (Leeds), March 5, 1842, cited by West, op. cit., p. 178.
August 5, 1844, in the market place at Northampton. At the debate O'Connor made a few rambling remarks about errors in some essays commissioned by the League, but never came close to the heart of the argument. Gammage, the Chartist historian, described it as "the greatest triumph the League ever obtained."74 O'Connor's case was so weak that it caused rumors among Chartists to the effect that he was bribed to allow Cobden to enjoy a stage victory. But one need not go so far for a probable explanation, it is only necessary to remember that close reasoning was always beyond O'Connor.

After the meeting at Northampton, he became noticeably more friendly toward Cobden and even approved the repeal of the Corn Law in 1846.75 The old rivalry between the two parallel movements was largely healed in December, 1845, when the Chartists in a conference definitely withdrew from opposition on the grounds that the famine in Ireland made a free trade market in grain urgently necessary to prevent working class suffering.

The question of the responsibility for the strikes in the summer of 1842 is still wide open to historical debate. In a recent study of the problem in the Journal of Modern History, Clark Kitson generally agrees with O'Connor's conclusion that the League provoked the strikes.76 The case against the League involved their use of violent language and belief

74 Gammage, op. cit., p. 255.
75 Ibid., p. 270.
that revolution was eminent and would be justified if there was no repeal of the Corn Law. Some of the League's placards read: "Murder! They that be slain with the swords are better than they that be slain of hunger." Cobden was also condemned for a foolish speech made in the House of Commons July 18, 1842, in which he declared that the people would "be justified in taking food for themselves and their families." But the most important point against the League was that the three firms in Staleybridge and Ashton which started the crisis by demanding reduction of wages were all prominent members of the League.

However, it is essential to explain the use of violent language at this time. The men of growing industrial areas spoke in a manner which was synonymous with the rough lives they led. Such revolutionary talk and manly defiance came easily for them. Solemn warnings of revolts were most likely spoken without realizing the full meaning of their content. In this light, it is more reasonable to assume that while the Leaguers talked of revolt, very few were behind any such activity. Whatever the origin of the strike, the Chartists were led to prison, while Leaguers collected fifty thousand pounds for their efforts in halting the strikers. Ironically, this is the significant biography of these two parallel movements in history. One was a success, the other, a failure.

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79 *Quarterly Review*, op. cit., p. 297.
A delayed result of the "Plug Plot" was O'Connor's trial with fifty-eight others at Lancaster in March, 1843. The indictment was long and involved, but its main point was that O'Connor had stirred up dissatisfaction by his seditious writing and speeches. It was an unusual trial, in which the judge, Baron Rolfe, showed much favor toward the prisoners. The Crown Prosecutors also showed a reluctance to push their charges home with any acrimony. O'Connor was fortunate in having such a late trial because the feeling aroused by the trouble in August of 1842, had had plenty of time to quiet down. The results were that O'Connor, who defended himself, was convicted on only one of the nine counts included in the indictment. When the case was carried to the Court of Queen's Bench, a technical flaw was discovered and none of the prisoners were called up for the judgment. In fact, the trial provided O'Connor with a good opportunity to win sympathy and publicity. He published a full report of the proceedings, interspersed with comments on his agricultural ventures and what is purported to be a true account of the strikes of 1842, attributing their origin to the designs of the Anti Corn Law League. Other Chartist leaders who were tried in other parts of England were not so fortunate. Thomas Cooper, Chartist leader from Leicester, was sentenced to two years imprisonment at Stafford Gaol for his activities in the "Plug Plot."

80 O'Connor, op. cit., p. 391-95.

81 See Annual Register, Vol. LXXXIV, 1842, p. 163.
Under O'Connor's control the Chartist Movement came to be led largely by the docile mediocrities, who could be relied upon to exhibit no independence or disagreement. Having quarrelled at one time or another with the best of the Chartist leaders, O'Connor was left with no able or intelligent men with whom he could work. The National Charter Association came increasingly to consist, as far as officials are concerned, of O'Connor's nominees. Feargus's ascendency was perhaps more remarkable because it was unofficial; he thought it better to rule the organization from a distance.

For the first three years of the National Charters Association's existence, he was not a member of the governing committee. It was partly a sign of declining confidence, partly a result of his determination to put his Land Scheme into practice, that in 1843, he joined the Executives of the National Charter Association.

Feargus O'Connor was now feverishly possessed by a new idea, one which would take both the movement and himself down a reactionary road to destruction. Under his powerful influence Chartism would be channelled from a movement for agitation of the Charter, into a grandiose plan for covering England with peasant farms tilled by regenerated factory workers who escaped from the dark, satanic mills which were beginning to pierce the skyline of the new industrial nation.

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82 Hovell, op. cit., p. 268.
CHAPTER V

DECLINE AND FAILURE

In the year 1852, the lonely figure of an old man could have been seen moving impatiently through the many arcades of the Covent Garden Market. Stopping occasionally to look at the various fruits and flowers, he would pick up a rose and then lay it down again with an infantile chuckle, as if there existed between them a special secret. In a world entirely of his own imagination, the white headed, vacuous eyed man was completely unaware of the shoppers staring at his old fashioned mankeen breeches and his shiny buckled shoes. It was obvious that he cared little for what was fashionable, but he was proud of his royal blue coat with brass buttons because it helped to remind him of his ancient Irish heritage. The observers who had known little about this figure might easily have been reminded of Mr. Dick in Charles Dickens' David Copperfield, but those who had known him probably stopped to marvel at the change in Feargus O'Connor, once renowned leader of the Chartist Movement. Gone was the flaming red hair, the egotistical swagger, the commanding voice, and the unbound physical strength. One might have asked, "what has happened to Feargus in these past years?"

The use of hindsight judgment by historians is, of course, a natural tendency, but it must be used with caution, especially in evaluating the actions of a single historical figure. In the case of Feargus


2 Coleman, op. cit., p. 244.
O'Connor, however, it would be justifiable to assume a speculative "if." It can easily be seen that "if" O'Connor had followed the advice of his friend, Thomas Cooper, he would have probably saved himself a great deal of suffering and possibly have prevented the tragedy of the above scene. In his autobiography Cooper wrote of his advice to O'Connor: "Occasionally, I called on O'Connor and conversed with him and he invariably expounded his Land Scheme to me and wished me to become one of its advocates. But I told him that I could not, and I begged him to give up the Scheme, for I felt sure it would bring ruin and disappointment upon himself and all who entered into it." But Feargus hardly heard Cooper speaking, so possessed was he with his new great idea. It seems that he was engrossed with the Land Scheme to such a degree that little could have been done to prevent his sacrificing his heart and soul for this ideal. It is understandable that its failure carried with it a complete collapse of O'Connor's mind and body.

The second great Chartist effort of 1842 helped to prepare the way for the agrarian excursion. The failure of this effort in 1842 and the aftermath brought by the "Plug Plot" left the Chartists without hope, energy, or direction. The year 1843 marked the beginning of a long period of decline; some historians would suggest that for all practical purposes the movement ended at this point. Certainly it can

4 See Briggs, op. cit., p. 306.
argued that as a purely political pressure group, Chartism lost its meaning. This was due not only because it proved to be ineffective, but also because the popular support of Chartism depended largely upon the prevailing economic conditions of the working man. Essentially Chartism was a "knife and fork" question and being the cry of hard times, it rose and fell according to the degree of misery suffered by the workers. After 1842 the general outlook for the proletariat was much improved over the preceding years. Although bread still remained high, wages were moving upward, unemployment was becoming less common, and many of the worst evils of the factory system were being corrected by legislation.\(^5\) Chartism, in the face of these improved conditions, experienced a marked decline. As an ideal it was long venerated by the people. In the process of decline the working men found other causes through which to express their opinions and grievances. Both the Anti-Corn Law League and Trade Unionism attracted the old Chartists. O'Connor was aware that he would soon be a captain without a ship, yet he knew that further agitation for the Charter had no chance of immediate success. But something was needed to keep the Chartists together! Something had to be devised or the Irish demagogue would have lost the commanding position and popularity he enjoyed so much. The Land Scheme was the answer to his challenge, but ironically, instead of saving the

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movement it pushed Chartism further along the road to disintegration.

An agricultural interest was not a new field for O'Connor; it was part of his permanent makeup which he had acquired from his early days in County Cork. Although he probably exaggerated both the extent and success of his farming ventures, there is reason to believe that he understood the problems of cultivation and sincerely appreciated the satisfaction which might result from tilling the soil. Even as a Chartist agitator leading the workers of the industrial town he never seemed to have forgotten his days of farming on his estate in Ireland. While he was serving his sentence in York Castle, following the failure of the first Chartist Petition, O'Connor amused himself writing a series of Letters to Irish Landlords. In these letters he pleaded with the Irish landlords to abandon the system of large farming and high rents by cutting the acreage of their estates into peasant holdings. With small peasant farms would come pride of ownership, prosperity, and good living. If this system was good for Ireland then Britain might profit from it also. Fundamentally, Feargus rejected the factory system as well as its misuses. He believed, like William Cobbett, that the real key to social well being was a return to the idyllic simplicity of village life.

In the 1840's, a decade of enormous energy, there could be found

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7 Ibid.
a large collection of leagues, societies, clubs, organizations, and philosophies. Although O'Connor's Land Scheme may seem ridiculous and reactionary from our present view, it would not seem as fantastically backward if placed beside such reactionary movements as the Young England group whose ideal was a regenerated feudal order of society and The Oxford Movement which advocated a return to Roman Catholicism. Certainly in feeling O'Connor was not far from the philosophy advocated later in the nineteenth century by the intellectual William Morris. A return to the values of handcraft produces was not far removed from a return to the values of peasant spade farming.

About the same time the Land Scheme was being launched in 1845, the Owenite Colony of Queenswood wound up its operations after six long years of frustration. It ended the hopes of many Socialists. Although O'Connor's Scheme owed much to the Queenswood experiment, basically they differed in ideas of ownership. In the Owenite Colonies the land was cultivated by the workers as a team and its producers shared in common; whereas each O'Connorite worker rented a separate holding and owned whatever it produced. O'Connor considered Owenite's ideas as an improvement on industrial competition but at the same time he had his own beliefs about ownership. He said: "Peasant proprietorship is the best basis of society." 8

Not until the spring of 1845 was the Land Scheme finally launched. The means by which O'Connor planned to make the workers "independent of the grinding capitalists," was to sell shares of the National Land Company to the workers at the cost of one pound, six shillings a share. In order to reach the poorest of labourers each share was payable by installments of three pence, six pence, one shilling, and upwards per week. The funds collected were to be used to purchase one or more estates, which were to be divided up into allotments upon which a member of the shareholders selected by ballot would be settled. The subscriber chosen with two shares was entitled to a house, three acres of land, and twenty two pounds, ten shillings for the year's expenses; the subscriber of four shares, to a house, four acres of land, and thirty pounds. Each allottee was expected to pay in return an annual rent of five pounds to the Society. Feergus figured that he could rent land at the rate of fifteen shillings per acre which might be bought at a twenty five years purchase for eighteen pounds, fifteen shillings per acre. Further figures of the company's plans of expansion can best be explained in O'Connor's own words:

And supposing £5,000 be raised, this sum would purchase 120 acres and locate 60 persons with two acres each, leaving a balance of £2,750 for building cottages, buying stock, etc. These allotments, with dwellings, must be leased for ever to the members of the society, at an annual rental of £5 each.


The gross annual rental would thus be £300. The property, if sold at 20 years' purchase, would fetch £6,000, which sum, if expended in a similar manner to the first, would locate 72 persons; these 72 allotments, sold at the rate of the first, would bring £7,200, and this sum, laid out in the purchase of other land, cottages, stock, etc., would locate 86 persons. This, sold again, would produce, at the original price, £8,600; with this capital the society could locate 103 persons. These 103 persons would produce £10,317, and would locate 123 persons. Thus the original capital of £5,000 would more than double itself at the fourth sale; and so in the same ratio, until the tenth sale would produce £37,324, which, if the project be taken up with spirit, might easily be effected in four years, and there would be 1,923 persons located with allotments of two acres. In the space of a few years a vast number of the "surplus labour population" could be placed in happiness and prosperity upon the soil of their native land.

More capital was to be raised by mortgaging the property and then in turn be used to buy more land, and so on indefinitely.

There were many obvious miscalculations in O'Connor's plan. He did not seem to take into consideration the difficulty of transforming a town's population, many who never had lived in the country, into productive peasant farmers. This aspect proved especially difficult with the system of lottery selections of the settlers. The ballot system took no precautions against getting the wrong people started on the land. Added to this presumption was the exaggerated calculation of the productivity of three or four acres of land. He recommended that three acres of land should be disposed of as follows: one acre of potatoes, one acre of wheat, three and one half roods cropped with cabbages, mangel-wurzel.

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turnips, tares, clover, flax, and the remainder in kitchen garden. The
following is an estimated list of production:

- Produce of an acre of potatoes, 15 tons.
- Produce of an acre of wheat, 200 stone.
- For growing stuff for cows, $\frac{2}{3}$ roods.
- For flax, 1 rood.
- For kitchen garden, $\frac{1}{3}$ rood.12

Only with modern fertilizer and machinery could O'Connor have obtained
this production; there was no possibility of making such a comfortable
living on three acres of land in 1843. These exaggerated figures in
the end turned many of the settlers against O'Connor; with high expecta-
tions they had picked up their spades only to find more worms than
vegetables. O'Connor, hypnotized by the prospect of mortgaging one es-
tate after another, failed to realize that if he had obtained a reason-
able degree of prosperity the land values would have risen to impossible
heights.

But for all of his wrong assumptions, the Land Scheme attracted
the workers by the thousands. This was partly due to O'Connor's popu-
arity with the workers. With all of his defects as an administrator
there can be no doubt of his ability as a company promoter. His con-
fidence, his fluency, his restless energy, were infectious and stimu-
lating. With his heart and soul in the Land Scheme he was able to pass
on to uncritical followers much of his own enthusiasm. He was assisted,

12_Fergus O'Connor, _A Practical Work on the Management of Small
of course, by the fact that the new urban masses still retained a strong nostalgia for the land; also by the fact that many of them would have joined any movement which offered the possibility of escape from their miserable way of life.

From the date of the official birth of the Land Scheme the workers poured in their hard earned shillings. By March, 1846, the resources were sufficient enough (over £7,000) to purchase the first estate. One hundred and three acres of the Herringgate estate near Watford, Hertford County, was bought for £2,343. Work on building cottages and allotments began almost at once, and the ceremonial inauguration of the estate took place on August 17, 1846. It was a memorable occasion on which visitors came from as far as Glasgow and Liverpool. Ernest Jones, who was at that time O'Connor's outstanding colleague in the Land Scheme, produced a poem for the event full of romantic nonsense about the peasant farming:

See there the cottage, labour's own abode,
The pleasant doorway on the cheerful road,
The airy floor, the roof from storms secure,
The merry fireside and the shelter sure,
And, dearest charm of all, the grateful soil,
That bears its produce for the hands that toil.

O'Connor delivered a speech which he later repeated in an address after his election for Nottingham in 1847. His speech reflected a clear and vivid mind:

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I tell you that I am neither leveller nor destructive—then I am for the altar, for the throne, and for the cottage; but I wish to see the altar the footstool of God, instead of the couch of Mammon. I wish to see the throne based upon the affections of the people, instead of the caprice of an aristocracy. I wish to see the cottage the castle of the freeman, instead of the den of the slaves.16

On that day the estate, renamed O'Connorville, was the scene of much rejoicing. According to The Northern Star, twenty thousand people were present,17 even the Daily News estimated that there were not less than twelve thousand persons attending the ceremony.18 No doubt O'Connor was in his glory. Adding to the festivities was Rebecca, the Chartist's cow, whose capacity for producing milk was quite amazing.

In October 1846, Feargus purchased another estate for the sum of £8,360. This second Chartist estate, somewhat larger than the first, was at Lowland in Worcestershire. In the same month the Land Scheme was provisionally registered under the name of the Chartist Co-operative Land Company. March 25, 1847, the name was changed again to the National Land Company which remained with it until the end.19 There was much difficulty about the registration because Tidd Pratt, the Registrar of Friendly Societies, would not admit that the company came under the category of a Friendly Society. Its political affiliations and its process of enrollment made it a very doubtful member. At the outset, in October, 1845, Henry MacNamara, a well known London barrister, expressed the view

16Ibid.  
17Ibid., cited by West, op. cit., p. 213.  
18Daily News (London), August 18, 1846, cited by West, op. cit., p. 213.  
19West, op. cit., p. 214.
that the society was "undoubtedly legal," and that it would be better to safeguard it by proper registration and by avoiding the ballot method of selecting settlers. Neither of these conditions were fulfilled. The allottees were drawn at random and nothing more than provisional registration could be achieved. That the organization was illegal and not really entitled to purchase land became the main argument of its numerous critics. Certainly the failure to obtain legality played a major role in causing the workers to abandon the Scheme.

Bronterre O'Brien, a Chartist intellectual who believed in land nationalization, was one of O'Connor's most ardent critics. He disliked the creation of peasant proprietors because their stake in the country would tend to make them reactionary. O'Brien vigorously attacked the National Charter Association and accused it of degenerating into a "mere coterie of O'Connor's partisans," whose object was not the Charter, "but the bolstering up of that demagogue and the hunting down of every man of worth and spirit who will not submit to his dictation."

Thomas Cooper, who had once been a strong supporter of O'Connor, broke with his former leader over the Land Scheme. Not satisfied with merely denouncing the Scheme, he advocated throwing O'Connor out of the party at the Convention in 1846. One of his resolutions read: "That this Convention regards Feergus O'Connor as unworthy the confidence of

20. The Northern Star (London), November 1, 1845.

Chartists, and hereby warns British working men of the folly and danger of union with him." O'Connor's strong control of the movement was apparent when Cooper was denied admission the following morning. O'Connor's greatest fault as a leader was his inability to get along with his fellow leaders. His continuous quarreling with his rivals caused trouble wherever he went.

Regardless of the breaks within the ranks of the Chartist Movement, money continued to flow into the Land Company. Between December 7, 1846, and August 14, 1847, £49,520 was received by the National Land Company. By November of the same year there were forty-two thousand shareholders who had paid eighty thousand pounds. In light of such encouraging support, O'Connor hastened to buy up more estates. In 1847, he bought two hundred ninety-seven acres at Minster Lovell eight miles from Worcester; in June another two hundred seventy acres were bought at Snig's End, six and one half miles from Gloucester.

The year 1847 was a high point in the history of the Land Scheme and in the life of O'Connor as well. With the General Election of that year, Fawcett again found himself as a Member of Parliament. When Sir Robert Peel embraced Free Trade in 1846 and obtained a majority in Parliament for his new commercial policy, the Tory Party, which had been in power since 1831, fell apart. Parliament was then dissolved and new

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24 Ibid. 25 Blossom, op. cit., p. 91.
elections followed in the summer of 1847. Spurred on, in part at least, by the collapse of the great trading boom, the Chartist Movement regained some of its vitality and put forward many Chartist candidates in the national elections.

In Nottingham both existing representatives had for one reason or another offended their supporters. Sir John Hobhouse had alienated the Dissenters, an influential group, by approving of a government grant for education. The Chartists of Nottingham realized their opportunities were excellent but hesitated to put up O'Connor as their candidate even though he was well known to them. Instead they proposed to invite William Simpson of Hammersmith to stand in the Chartist name. He declined, however, and shortly thereafter O'Connor was invited to become the Chartist candidate. With his arrival the contest aroused a good deal of excitement; however, the news of O'Connor's nomination was received without much notice by The Times which was content to point out that his chance of success would very soon be demonstrated. On July 28, 1847, O'Connor found himself in contest with Hobhouse, Gisborne, and younger John Walter. In his election address Feargus played up the fact that he had designed the Land Scheme and when the results of the election were announced on July 27, the victorious candidates were Walter and O'Connor. In view of their predictions, The Times was greatly disturbed by this fact and commented thusly: "The result of the Nottingham election

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26 The Times (London), May 29, 1847.
27 Ibid., July 12, 1847.
is about as surprising an occurrence as could arise from the mere movements of human action and feeling."^{28}

O'Conor's election naturally stimulated the Chartist cause, for he, of all people, was the embodiment of the working class hopes. He was the only official representative of the Chartist Movement to reach Westminster. His new position also helped direct the movement back into political channels, even O'Connor's agrarian interests were temporarily put aside. Before the election he wrote, "the land question will keep, it will wait, but the election question will not, and I wish moreover to convince the false prophets that with me, at least, the land is of secondary importance, while the Charter is of paramount importance and always has been."^{29}

There was plenty to occupy O'Connor's time while he was a Member of Parliament. Daniel O'Connell had died in 1847 and Irish affairs came increasingly under Peel's review. He also had to deal with the Chartists revival which accompanied "the years of revolutions." The preparations for a third and last Chartist Petition made O'Connor's position in the House of Commons of special importance. He could now act as a link between the rulers and the ruled. On the whole his experience in the House of Commons tended to make him more responsible and much less inflammatory, even in his speeches at the mass meetings of the Chartists.

^{28}Ibid., July 31, 1847.

^{29}The Northern Star (London), July 17, 1848.
Before further investigation of O'Connor's activities, it would be appropriate at this point to deal with the ending of the Land Scheme. Far from collapsing suddenly after the Parliamentary investigation, the Land Scheme did, however, cease to play an important role in the Chartist Movement. The National Land Company bought a total of six estates but the purchase of the last and largest estate, Mathon, near Worcester, was never completed.30 Minster Lovell and Snig's End, the last two estates to receive settlers, began to operate on the eve of the Parliamentary investigations which was to shatter the confidence of the workers and begin the process of decline.

Among the many factors which caused Parliament to order an investigation of the National Land Company in 1848 were the complaints by some of the new farmers of the inability to make a living on their holdings, the questionable loyalty of the organization, and the visible signs of mismanagement. But it was a newspaper campaign by O'Connor's political opponents that finally forced Parliamentary action.31 After much evidence was taken, and a series of reports were issued by two bookkeepers appointed to untangle the accountants books, the Select Committee of the House of Commons made its final statement on August, 1848.32 In their conclusions, the Committee stated that the Land Company was an illegal scheme which was not consistent with the general principles upon which the Friendly

30 Slosson, op. cit., p. 91
31 West, op. cit., p. 221.
Society was founded. Much criticism of the Land Company resulted from O'Connor's doubtful handling of the Company's finances. It was assumed by many that Feargus had been pursuing his own interests by using other people's money to buy estates. That the Committee found the Company's accounts in a disarray was not too surprising because O'Connor's personal finances were a mystery. But they found no evidence that O'Connor was pocketing the shareholder's money. In fact, it was shown that the opposite was true. The Company owed O'Connor money. The Committee was of the opinion that the Company's minutes and accounts had been most imperfectly kept:

But Mr. Feargus O'Connor having expressed an opinion that an impression had gone abroad that the monies subscribed by the National Land Company had been applied to his own benefit, this Committee are clearly of opinion, that although the accounts have not been kept with strict regularity, yet that irregularity has been against Feargus O'Connor's interest, instead of in his favour; and that it appears by Mr. Grey's account there is due to Mr. Feargus O'Connor the sum of £3,298 5s. 3½d., and by Mr. Finlayson's account the sum of £3,400.3

Rather curiously, O'Connor was quite pleased with the Committee's verdict. Perhaps he did not realize that although he was not found to be a swindler and rogue, he was shown to be a man of chaotic business habits, hardly capable of handling his finances, let alone those of the working men.

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33 Ibid.
34 Howall, op. cit., p. 278.
The judgment of the Committee was certainly a fatal blow for O'Connor because it destroyed the one thing that made his career possible—public confidence in his leadership. Shortly after the investigation, supporting funds began to dwindle. With some bitterness Feargus expressed his opinion about the "sudden and unaccountable alteration in popular feeling," which resulted in acute shortage of subscriptions. "The number of persons who have merely subscribed a few shillings and then stopped, apparently for the purpose of being entitled to gamble, is very large." 36

The select Committee did not stipulate that the Land Company should fold up, it merely suggested that it might be advisable to do so. No doubt it expected that the Land Scheme would be liquidated, but it did not speak in the imperative. In fact, O'Connor did not try to dissolve his plan until circumstances compelled him to do so. He had hoped to carry on after 1848. Not until absolute disaster stared him in the face did he agree to liquidate the enterprise which had become the embodiment of all his hopes of a better world for the working man.

Failure to make a substantial living from the soil soon brought the wrath of many of the settlers down upon the Chartist leader. O'Connorville was the only estate which proved to have any degree of farming success; the settlers of the other estates suffered to the point of starvation. By the spring and early summer of 1849, many of the settlers had deserted and returned to the towns or reported to the Poor Law

36 The Northern Star (London), November 25, 1848.
Their disillusionment was intensified by the high hopes O'Connor had raised by his erroneous calculations of how a living might be earned on the land. Making O'Connor the scapegoat for their misery was only natural, but it must be remembered that most of the settlers were unskilled in agricultural work. In addition, these inexperienced town people often were not sufficiently robust for farm work. No doubt many of them failed to appreciate that hard labour was as necessary in the idyllic countryside as in the towns.

Closing the work of the Land Company proved to be as expensive as trying to continue. In order to get money to accomplish this end, O'Connor attempted to collect from the allottees the back rent which was due. The method employed tended to make the situation worse as O'Connor sent the police to collect the rent on some of the estates. At Snig's End the peasants presented a united front against the law saying that they would "manure the land with their blood before it should be taken from them." The bailiffs left without a fight and O'Connor was without his money.

Sharman Crawford presented a petition to the House of Commons on July 9, 1850, asking for a Bill to dissolve the Land Company, but it was not until August, 1851, that the resulting Act became effective. Madness, however, had taken O'Connor from the scene before the Land Scheme

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37 Hovell, op. cit., p. 293. 38 The Times (London), September 5, 1850.
39 West, op. cit., pp. 222-23.
was fully dealt with. An official manager was appointed by the Court of Chancery in September, 1852. The rents payable by allottees were fixed and a settlement of property at O'Connorsville was reached. Bone fide purchases of land through the Company were allowed to retain their holdings, while the remainder of the properties were to be sold. The Scheme was liquidated.

One of the facts which a study of the Land Scheme brings forth is that it was not as ridiculous as many of its critics believed. No doubt the details of O'Connor's plan were unsound. Many faults could be found in it: (1) reliance upon impossible yields, (2) failure to recognize the weakness of the ballot as a method of selection, (3) disregard for the law, and (4) belief in the idea of progressive mortgaging. But these were concerned with practical management rather than the theory itself and do not necessarily invalidate what O'Connor was trying to accomplish. It was really quite useful to relieve a congested labour market by placing some of the industrial unemployed upon the land. Moreover, a sincere attempt to alleviate some of the misery of the working men could not be called entirely foolish, no matter how utopian it might seem. It is entirely possible that if O'Connor had realized his own limitations, and confined himself to aims which were possible of attainment, he might have earned the gratitude of his generation instead of its ridicule.

\[40\] Ibid. \[41\] Ibid.
If the year 1847 proved to be a high point in the career of Fear- 
gus O'Connor, then, conversely, 1848 was a low point. Not only did he 
lose the confidence of his followers with the collapse of the Land Scheme, 
but with the fiasco of the Chartist demonstrations on April 10, 1848,
the finishing touches were put on his portrait of failure. The events 
of Kennington Commons on April 10, are a familiar story and may be found 
in excellent style in the Annual Register of that year.\textsuperscript{42} For the pur-
pose of this study it may be said that O'Connor's activities followed 
the same pattern of vacillation evident after the Chartist Petition of 
1839 and 1842. When Feargus observed that the majority of the Chartists 
had caught the same fever of revolution that was sweeping throughout the 
Continent, he did not hesitate to join in the cry for blood. On April 
1, he appealed to his fellow Chartists:

Onward and we conquer,
Backward and we fall! 
The People's Charter and no surrender!\textsuperscript{43}

But he quickly changed his tune when it became evident that his fol-
lowers faced an army of special constables estimated to be over one 
hundred fifty thousand men, including the future Emperor of France, 
 Louis Napoleon.\textsuperscript{44} O'Connor then urged the demonstrators to do nothing 
 rash and put their faith in the moral force of six million signatures 
of the Petition.\textsuperscript{45} Once more his actions looked suspiciously like

\textsuperscript{42}See Annual Register, Vol. XC, 1848, pp. 50-54.
\textsuperscript{43}Beer, op. cit., p. 166 \textsuperscript{44}The Times (London), April 11, 1848.
\textsuperscript{45}Ibid.
personal cowardice but can be explained more clearly with the realization that O'Connor habitually allowed his violent language to run away with him without intending that his remarks be taken too literally. Apart from the question of inconsistency, however, O'Connor showed that he was older and wiser than the extremists who assailed him. Open conflict could only have done harm and retarded the accelerated program of reform. He might have emerged without loss of dignity and prestige had he chosen to fight it out, but instead: "Mr. Feargus O'Connor has shown that quality which was as good as valour in Sir John Falstaff and which was still better than valour in him—discretion."46

When the Petition was examined in the House of Commons, O'Connor's behaviour proved to be even less favorable to his fellow Chartists. After boasting that the Petition carried over five million signatures it came as a terrible shock to discover that there were actually less than two million signatures and that many of these were obviously spurious. 47 O'Connor attempted to cover up his blunder by declaring that no Committee could have counted the number of signatures on the Petition in such a short period of time. But he received no satisfaction and when a member mentioned that O'Connor could not be believed anyway, Feargus immediately challenged him to a duel.48 This farcical incident

46 The Illustrated London News, April 15, 1848.
47 Hansard, as cit., 3rd Series, Vol. VCIII, 1848, pp. 284–301.
48 ibid., p. 285.
only added to his growing unpopularity with the Chartist. When a Chartist National Assembly voted for a new Executive Board in the summer, O'Connor was left without a seat and the revolt against his leadership became general.

Aware of his fallen position, O'Connor neglected his duty of initiating a debate in the House of Commons on the Chartist demands. Not until a year later did he again bring forth the demands of the Charter and then the speech was wasted on a largely unsympathetic House of Commons. The Charter was voted down on July 3, 1849, by an overwhelming majority of two hundred twenty four to fifteen. On July 11, 1850, O'Connor made a final attempt to bring the Charter to the notice of Parliament. Introducing it with an address more influenced by Socialistic ideas than before, he was not even able to obtain the required attendance of forty members necessary for a vote. This ended the inglorious Parliamentary career of the Charter. With O'Connor discredited by the fiasco of 1848, Ernest Jones had no difficulty dominating the movement for the remaining years of its existence. From then on Fergus spoke rarely, and when he spoke, often it was on Irish questions.

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49 West, op. cit., p. 253.
51 Ibid., p. 4504.
In the end his strong adherence to Chartist principles began to give way to a desire to come to terms with the middle class. Experience must have shown the futility of expecting the unenlightened masses of working men to achieve great results unaided. When Joseph Hume attempted to gain support for his "Little Charter," a diluted version of the People's Charter based on household suffrage, O'Connor was completely in favor. He had been connected with it as early as May, 1848, but most actively advocated it in a speech on October 3, 1849, when he stated, "he was happy to say that throughout England and Scotland every Chartist had now fraternized with the middle class in this movement and he should be the last man to stand in the way of such a combination for good." 54

The character of Chartist in these later years was heavily modified by its growing connection with the revolutionary movements on the Continent, which brought with it a strong portion of Socialist ideas. Fergus had never been entirely aloof of the Continent because of his family connections with the United Irishmen and his uncle Arthur, who lived in exile in France. In 1845, he visited Belgium in order to get information to assist in his agrarian program 55 and in 1846, his electoral excursion at Nottingham earned a congratulatory letter from Karl Marx and Friedrich Engels. 56 On the other hand, it was an essential

53 Sommase, op. cit., p. 389.
54 The Northern Star (London), October 6, 1849.
56 Seers, op. cit., p. 164.
part of his creed to reject anything approaching Communism. This had brought him into conflict with G. J. Harney, a Social Democrat who was a close associate of Engels and Marx. Early in 1849, he criticized Harney for distracting the attention of the Chartists from domestic questions to foreign affairs. This provoked the retort that O'Connor had already been guilty of introducing extraneous aims into the movement with the Land Scheme. Harney, in fact, got the upper hand in the dispute, while O'Connor, fast losing his leadership of the movement, failed to prevent Chartist from disintegrating into Socialism on one hand and middle class innovation on the other. In its last stage Chartist appeared increasingly a part of the general mid-nineteenth century European protest against capitalism.

O'Connor could always be relied upon for starting eccentricities of behavior. He had always been impulsive, unruly, and unpredictable, thus the madness which slowly descended upon him went unobserved at first. It is probable that he inherited a tendency to mental unbalance from his obviously abnormal father, but it was the combination of the incessant turmoil of politics, the cutting attacks of critics, the long ordeal of the Land Scheme, and Irish whisky which transformed the tendency into a reality. During his last years he was increasingly prone to drown his sorrows in strong drink. It is said that he would dictate

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57 *The Northern Star* (London), March 3, 1849.


letters to his nephew Roger, while pacing the room and taking frequent
draughts from a glass of strong whisky. 60 Drink and anxiety combined to
lacerate his thinking and he became more and more boisterous and irrational.
He was liable to perform freakish tricks in the House of Commons
such as mimicking the Speaker in the chair, or slapping Lord Palmerston
strongly on the back. At the official welcome given for Kossuth, the
Hungarian patriot, in October 1851, O’Connor greeted him with such tumultuous enthusiasm that the patriot was extremely embarrassed 61 and it was
becoming painfully clear that O’Connor was not in his right mind. After
August, 1850, he wrote little for The Northern Star and in the paper,
December 13, of that year, an anonymous writer remarked gravely about
O’Connor’s condition in the following language:

I am sure I am serving the cause of the Charter by advising the withdrawal of his name, and I feel equally sure I am doing Mr. O’Connor a hearty service by soliciting him to take no active part in the future of Chartism, until his constitution has recovered from the shock which the enemies of his
Land Scheme have chiefly occasioned. 62

By 1852, O’Connor was obviously incapable of handling himself, let alone
discharging the affairs of the nation as a Member of Parliament. Even
The Northern Star fell from his grip passing to William Rider (its
printer and publisher) for one hundred pounds on January 3, 1852. 63
Later it was sold to George Harney and, finally, ceased publication
during November 1852. 64

60 Frost, op. cit., p. 182. 61 West, op. cit., p. 266.
62 The Northern Star (London), December 13, 1851.
63 Beers, op. cit., p. 173. 64 Ibid.
Somehow O'Connor managed to make a short visit to the United States during the spring of 1852. It was probably done to avoid the steps which were taken by his friends to put him in an asylum where he could be cared for. He returned from America early in June, but his behavior was then even more erratic. The climax came on June 9, 1852 when Feargus struck Beckett Denison (a member of the House of Commons for West Riding of Yorkshire) a sharp blow in the face. He was arrested by the Sergeant-at-Arms and soon afterwards, on the petition of his sister, Harriet O'Connor, was examined and pronounced insane. A few days later he was taken to a private asylum in Cheswick where he lingered on in life for three more years, growing more and more incoherent and paralyzed. His death was undoubtedly hastened by the abrupt intervention of his sister who took him from the asylum (on what legal ground is not clear) to her home in Albert Terrace, Nottinghill. Here he died only ten days after leaving the asylum on August 30, 1855.

The funeral which took place at Kensal Green Cemetery September 10, was paid for by public subscription. Lovett, forgetting old enmities, was helpful with the arrangements. A long procession of working people followed the hearse, some bearing banners claiming, "he lived

65 West, op. cit., p. 266. 66 The Times (London), May 26, 1852.
68 Ibid.
69 See Annual Register, Vol. XVII, 1855, p. 302.
and died for us.70 Regardless of the rain which fell, a large crowd gathered, estimated at twenty thousand people by The Times,71 and fifty thousand by the Chartists.72 It was a high tribute to Feargus O'Connor that in spite of his final failure and last sickness, he was still held in honor and respect by a large number of working men.

70 The Times (London), September 11, 1855.
71 Ibid.
CONCLUSION

In many ways the Chartist Movement may be compared with a prize fighter who, because of poor coaching and lack of uniform stance, was knocked down and stunned in the third round of a championship fight. Little surprise would be expressed over such a failure as it would be said that the pugilist was obviously fighting against almost impossible odds. The amazing fact was that such a man showed enough ability to stay on his feet for the remainder of the battle. While it is easy to point to a fighter's reflex actions and excellent physical condition as reasons for tenacity, it is quite another problem to find adequate reasons why Chartism, after a decisive defeat in 1842, retained the loyalty of great numbers of supporters for at least ten years after it was shown to be an unattainable program. Aside from the fact that some portions of the British working class population were always discontented enough to remain in dissent, a more probable explanation for the Chartists lasting popularity is that it not only was an answer to the economic demands of the working class, but also it gave expression to their spiritual needs. The labourers of the miserable nineteenth century industrial towns, for the lack of anything better, used Chartism to fill a religious vacuum in their lives. In fact, this religious zeal caused many Chartists, after the early defeats, to split from the main group to found a faction called Church Chartism under the leadership of John Collins and Arthur O'Neill.
While it would be erroneous to suggest that Chartism was a "religion," it can be shown to have had many traits of religion. Chartism had a Sacred Book, Disciples and Martyrs, a place of pilgrimage, and a Founder and Messiah. The People's Charter was their Sacred Book, London their place of pilgrimage. Cooper, Jones, O'Brien, and Lovett (men who sacrificed all for the Charter) were but a few of the many Disciples and Martyrs. Above all there was Feargus O'Connor, a man worshiped by the great masses of working people as the Founder and Messiah. According to the Chartist Gospel:

And thus did Feargus O'Connor harass the tyrants, and despoil the oppressors of every kind, even from the days of William the Foolish and the sixth year of the reign of Victoria.

And he opened his mouth and taught them saying: Ye Chartists are the salt of the earth: Ye are the light of the world: Let your light so shine before men that they may see the truth of the Charter, and seeing believe.¹

If O'Connor had exhibited more godly virtues and been plagued by fewer human frailties, perhaps Chartism might have attained greater success. As it was O'Connor, to a great degree, was a blundering egotist given to talking much nonsense; also he was not immune from sordid and selfish motives. In addition, his Irish temper, which led him to eliminate most of his rivals, extracted a heavy toll from the Chartist strength. William Lovett, a man of humble nature, would have been a far better Messiah for the Chartists; but he lacked the necessary physical attraction, the stentorian voice, and emotional appeal to win the

¹See Appendix B, pp. 135-36.
hearts of the downtrodden. It is not difficult to discover the reasons Lovett disliked O'Connor with such a passion. Not only did O'Connor rob him of his rightful place of leadership, but he was also largely responsible for transforming Chartism from a peaceful and respectable agitation (which Lovett had desired) into a mass movement of the urban proletariat seeking revolutionary change. O'Connor's contempt for culture and restraint, his reckless flattering of his followers, his appetite for power, and, finally, his turning of the Chartists from the early aims to the Land Scheme, were all quite alien to the best interests of the working class as envisioned by Lovett and other intellectuals among the leaders of Chartism. His control of Chartism, which was gradually acquired, did much to destroy its standing with the middle and upper classes. If Chartism had not become widely identified with O'Connor's blustering violence, his inconsistencies, and vacillations, its practical achievements might have been greater.

On the other hand, had Chartism been recorded as a winning cause, rather than one defeated, perhaps posterity would have judged O'Connor quite differently as he was also said to be a warm, jovial, and sympathetic person. In truth, Chartism seems to have been doomed from the beginning, regardless of the person leading its activities, because it was fighting against the tremendous power of the new British middle class that was rapidly coming to terms with the old governing classes. These people were determined not to have universal suffrage or the "six points" at any cost. Beneath the Chartists demands lay the desire
to relieve economic hardship, gain higher wages, better factory conditions, and repeal the new Poor Law; all aims which even the most radical members of the new middle class were unready to support. Without the help of the middle classes, the working poor were almost powerless. When the pressure of the Chartist Petitions repeatedly failed to influence Parliament, it followed that the alternative for making the Charter the law of the land, was revolution. This was an unacceptable way for most Englishmen who, as the nation prospered, became increasingly conservative. The failure of Chartism, as we have seen, tended to magnify O'Connor's faults. Nevertheless, it must be recorded that he honestly sympathized with the hungry Irish peasant exploited by absentee landlords, with the often unemployed hand-loom weaver engaged in a hopeless struggle against the new factory system, and with the miserable pauper separated from his wife and child and isolated in one of the deplorable workhouses provided under the new Poor Law. His feeling for such people was strong and genuine and it was this quality that made the wretched and the oppressed all over England look up to Fergus O'Connor as their Saviour. In the end he wore himself out because he was their champion.
BIBLIOGRAPHY
BIBLIOGRAPHY

A. PRIMARY SOURCES

1. Collected Documents

This contains a large source of general information on Chartism, but has little information on O'Connor's activities.

A most valuable selection of Chartist sources published in a single volume. The editors are top authorities in this area of study.

Excellent commentary. A selection which covers the highlights of the Chartist Movement.


Home Office Papers. 1839-40.

The Place Manuscripts.
Most studies of Chartism center about these manuscripts. They were unavailable for this study, but for further research can be located at the British Museum.

2. Books

The author's recollections of events and circumstances since 1832.

The author has a misunderstanding of the basic issues of the movement, but this book became the springboard from which Chartism moved into literature.

Intellectuals followed Carlyle in the creation of social industrial novels.

The author was a loyal follower of O'Connor but he broke with him when the Land Scheme dominated the Chartist Movement.


Books which contain excellent accounts of early political career of O'Connor.


This book is based partly on Parliamentary reports, but in places it luxuriates in the misery of the working man.


A sympathetic treatment of O'Connor's early years.


The author was a Chartist and the book is based on contemporary records—good quotations of speeches—author hated O'Connor.


A historical, statistical, and theoretical study of British economic development.


The author was an active Chartist since the Birmingham Bull Ring Riot of 1839. This is valuable as a personality study of the radical leaders in Victorian England.


The author disliked O'Connor with a passion. Basic source on the beginning of Chartism.


Basic material for background of O'Connor family.


This source contains portrait of O'Connor as an old man; author excuses some of O'Connor's political follies in light of his madness.
126


A picture of the explosive situation in northern England in 1839-40.

The introduction is of greater value than the basic contents.

A basic material for the understanding of O'Connor's Land Scheme.

This contains an article on the O'Connor family of Carrigtwohill.

A companion piece to Gammage's history of Chartist Movement.

A view of upper class opinion of Chartist Movement.

Useful material on early life of O'Connor.

A selection of the Chartist leader's writings and speeches.

2. Periodicals


The Illustrated London News.

Quarterly Review.

4. Newspapers

The National Instructor (London), 1850.

The Northern Star (Leeds and London), 1837-52.

This source was used in part at the Harvard Widener Library but due to limited time, it was not investigated completely.

The Times (London), 1836-55.

(The following newspapers, unavailable in the original form, were cited from texts.)


The London Democrat, 1839-40.

National Reformer (Douglas), 1845-46.

The Morning Chronicle (London), 1839-55.

B. SECONDARY SOURCES

1. Books


A small but excellent book on background material—good bibliography.

The author emphasizes the revolutionary aspects of the Chartist Movement.


This recent study proved to have a superior treatment of the general aspects of Chartistism.


General background material.


Contains little information on O'Connor's family but the author is the originator of O'Connor's tree found in this study.


The most accurate evaluation of O'Connor's career—good bibliography.


These volumes can be easily used to supplement the author's Select Documents.


Excellent background material—small but accurate account of the Chartist Movement.


The author pays a tribute to O'Connor's historical importance by placing him beside such men as William Cobbett and Robert Owen.


Basic history of Irish politics.


A small account of O'Connor's activities in the Poor Law agitation, 1836-38.
   A journalistic approach to the details of the 1840's, excellent background material.

   This book shows the substitution of Chartism for Christianity.

   Essential background material.

   The author emphasizes Chartism as part of Socialistic heritage.

   A careful analysis of the Chartist failure.

   A general background of the period with little detail on the Chartist Movement.

   An excellent treatment of early phases, but weak on the finishing aspects. Supports the "moral force" of the Lovett school.


   Important material for understanding relations between O'Connell and O'Connor.

   An invaluable study of middle class radicalism during the Chartist period.

   Essential background material.

New evidence based on papers of George Wilson, President of the League.


Background material with good bibliography.


Well documented study, but poor interpretation.


Superb analysis of causes of decline—reasonable treatment of O'Conno's leadership.


This source is the researcher's right hand.


An important book for understanding the relations of the anti-Corn Law League and Chartist.


A biography which shows the radical's view of the Chartist Movement.


Useful for the interpretation of the causes of Chartist.


A book which balances the defects of Novell's history. Excellent material on the late political actions of Feargus O'Connor.


A careful study of O'Connor's actions in the affair of the Newport uprising—excellent biography.

2. Novels

The social novels proved to be more valuable for the understanding of this period of history than many of the basic texts. They convey the spirit of a growing nation struggling under the birth pains of the new industrial classes.


Kingsley, Charles. Alton Locke. London: T. Nelson and Sons, Ltd., 1930. The character of Mr. O'Flynn was created to resemble Pearsus O'Connor.


Spring, Howard. Name is the Spur. New York: The Viking Press, 1940.


3. Periodicals


APPENDIX
APPENDIX A

THE PEOPLE'S CHARTER

THE SIX POINTS

1. A vote for every man twenty one years of age, of sound mind, and not undergoing punishment for crime.

2. THE BALLOT.—To protect the elector in the exercise of his vote.

3. NO PROPERTY QUALIFICATION for Members of Parliament—thus enabling the constituencies to return the men of their choice, be he rich or poor.

4. PAYMENT OF MEMBERS, thus enabling an honest tradesman, working man, or other person, to serve a constituency, when taken from his business to attend to the interests of the country.

5. EQUAL CONSTITUENCIES, securing the same amount of representation for the same number of electors,—instead of allowing small constituencies to swamp the votes of larger ones.

6. ANNUAL PARLIAMENTS, thus presenting the most effectual check to bribery and intimidation, since though a constituency might be bought once in seven years (even with the ballot), no purse could buy a constituency (under a system of universal suffrage) in each ensuing twelvemonth; and since members, when elected for a year only, would not be able to defy and betray their constituents as now.

The three Chartist Petitions contained basically these six points; the second Petition demanded in addition a Repeal of the Union and a Repeal of the new Poor Law of 1834. The Third Petition showed the effects of Chartist disintegration by the elimination of one of the six basic demands—the secret ballot.

1From a Hand Bill, 1839, cited by Cole and Filson, op. cit., p. 352.
APPENDIX B

CHARTIST GOSPEL—A NEW REVELATION

THE BOOK OF THE CHRONICLES OF THE DEMOCRATS

1. Victoria being Queen of the Isles and of extensive countries abroad, Sir Robert Peel being Prime Minister, Sir James Graham being Secretary for the Home Department, and the Earl de Grey being Governor of the Land of Erin.

2. In those days came Feargus O'Connor, preaching to the whole people of the United Queandom of Great Britain and Ireland.

3. Saying, the day of justice draweth nigh, for the masses are awakening from their sleep.

4. But when he saw the Tories, and the Whigs, and the Corn-Law repealers, come to hear, he said unto them, O generation of vipers, what hath induced you to fleece and rob the people.

5. And think not to say unto yourselves we are just before God; Amen, I say unto you, Repent lest you may be punished for your evil deeds.

6. For reason is gone abroad and will soon penetrate the minds of all men, and will force them to become lovers of liberty.

7. And thus did Feargus O'Connor harass the tyrants, and despots and oppressors of every kind, even from the days of William the Foolish and the sixth year of the reign of Victoria.

8. And the lawyers, and chief priests, and factory masters conspired together to put him to death, but they could not for fear of the people.

9. But they put him into prison for the long space of sixteen months; even in York Castle did they confine him.

10. So that his fame extended to all parts of the world where democracy is known; from the banks of the Thames to the banks of the sire of rivers.

11. In the sixth year of the reign of Victoria, the first and last, he went to the city of long chimneys and cotton factories to instruct the people, and thousands of thousands of people came from the surrounding towns to hear him.
12. And he opened his mouth and taught them saying:

13. Ye Chartists are the salt of the earth: Ye are the light of the world: let your light so shine before men that they may see the truth of the Charter, and seeing believe.

14. Think not I am come to destroy the Constitution; no, but to restore it: nor to injure life; no, but to preserve it. I am come to assist the needy, to instruct the ignorant, to confirm the timid, to raise you from slavery, and to establish justice.

15. No man can serve two masters; for either he will hate the one and love the other, or he will hold to the one and despise the other. Ye cannot serve Whiggism and Toryism with Chartism.

16. Judge not rashly nor unjustly, lest you yourselves might be judged; for most assuredly will the people hold those that dispense justice responsible for their acts.

17. Beware of false teachers and pretended friends who come to you in sheep's clothing, but who inwardly are ravenous wolves.

18. Therefore, whosoever heareth these sayings of mine, and doeth them, I will liken him unto a wise man who built his home upon a rock and the storms arose and prevailed not against it.

19. And it came to pass as Fergus O'Connor sojourned to an inn for refreshment, he saw Jonathan Bairstow; and he said unto him, Follow thou me. And when he sat down to eat with working men, and when the Whigs and Tories saw it, they marvelled amongst themselves that he should do this.

20. And the names of a few of the great apostles of Chartism were F. O'Connor, the son of Roger and nephew of Arthur, and James Leach, and Peter Murrey McDouell, and John Campbell and J. A. R. Bairstow, and R. K. Philip, and William Hill and James Scholefield, and Morgan Williams, and George Julian Harney, and George White, and Thomas Cooper, and Christopher Doyle, and Bernard McCartney, and Thomas Clarke, and James McArthur, and John Luncan, and Robert Lowrie, and William Beasley, and Ruffy Ridley, and Thomas Wheeler. And there were hundreds of disciples of this great party in all parts of the Western Isles.

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