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LANCASHIRE CHARTISM AND THE MASS STRIKE OF 1842:  
THE POLITICAL ECONOMY OF WORKING CLASS CONTENTION

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I

LANCASHIRE CHARTISM AND THE MASS STRIKE OF 1842:  
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The study which follows is concerned with a predominantly working class movement for democratic rights. It analyzes the economic, social, and political character of the movement for the People's Charter as it evolved in Lancashire, England during 1842. The Charter embodied six basic demands: (1) Universal manhood suffrage; (2) Payment of Members of Parliament; (3) Annual Parliaments; (4) Vote by ballot; (5) Equal electoral districts; and (6) Abolition of property qualifications for candidates. In analyzing Chartism, we have attempted to maintain a balance between theoretical issues in the study of radical collective contention and historical ones about the overall nature of Chartism. We have tried to maintain the active, historical voice of the participants through extensive quotation while simultaneously engaging in theoretical and historical disputes.

\* My intellectual debt to Charles Tilly will be obvious throughout, but I would also like to recognize my personal one as well. My friend Youssef Cohen took time from his own demanding chores to help me out of some labyrinthine difficulties. Linda is actually a coauthor and much, much more. Last but not least, the Sociology Department of The University of Michigan provided essential financial support during the completion of this study.

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Hopefully, the combination of discourses results in an accurate and convincing causal explanation of Chartism without, however, sacrificing the more personal and contingent dramas it involved.

The use of "Political Economy" in the title is not meant to be fashionable. Rather, it sums up the two levels of social phenomena that are most significant for both explaining and understanding Lancashire Chartism. The overall argument unfolds by moving from structural economic factors through more immediate conjunctural ones to political processes and actions. Each movement defines a critical and significant range of phenomena for the explanation of Chartism. They do so, however, in terms of an increasing level of explanatory adequacy with the political dimension being the most informative. Structure defines the realm of significant actors, conflict axes, and modalities of contention. Conjunctural factors operate primarily by creating specific conflicts and types of relations between those actors. Finally, political circumstances and actions influence levels of contention through their effect on mobilization and demobilization. Yet, none of these levels or dimensions can be accurately understood or explained without the others. Structures, situations and self-conscious political actions were all parts of Chartist contention in 1842 Lancashire.

## II

There are three broad movements in this portion of the paper. The first uses the works of Neil Smelser and Friedrich Engels to present two generally advanced and conflicting historical interpretations of the nature and dynamics of Chartism.<sup>1</sup> The second develops the implicit theoretical perspectives contained in these interpretations. The final one revolves around the substantive evaluation of their respective explanatory merits and the presentation of a more fully developed explanation of Lancashire Chartism. Essentially, we move from the specifics of historical interpretations through the theoretical issues and problematics embedded in them and, finally, to the issue of their theoretical-historical explanatory adequacy. Our overall purpose is to provide a comparative, historical-theoretic explanation of Lancashire Chartism in 1842.

Neil Smelser's Social Change and the Industrial Revolution is a self-conscious attempt to explain the dynamics of the industrial revolution within a structural-functional theory. I am not concerned with the overall adequacy of his analysis. My interest is with his explanation of the "political turmoil" he sees Chartism as representing. Smelser's basic argument is that urbanization and industrialization led to the disruption of the traditional, familial economy of the working class. The disruption caused by these basic processes of social change "...underlay much of the turmoil among operatives and others between 1825 and 1850."<sup>2</sup> Smelser emphasizes how the

transition to modern, urban-industrial England generated "strains and tensions" which were then expressed in radical collective "movements" such as Chartism:

In the late 1830's and 1840's, ...the spinners' and other factory operatives' involvement in social explosions was limited, particularly when compared with their activities in the early 1830's [i.e., their transitional period] and the excessive activities of other groups in 1837-42. One important reason for this is that the factory operatives were gradually approaching the completion of a sequence of differentiation whereby their family and community structure was entering the industrial era on a new basis. By contrast...the weavers and related groups [i.e., those in their transitional phase] were grasping for their very life.<sup>3</sup>

Once the transitional strains of urbanization and industrialization had passed and workers had been integrated into urban-industrial society, "vigorous political turmoil", even in "years of unemployment and distress" like 1842, was unlikely.<sup>4</sup>

Engels paints a very different picture of the social basis and dynamics of Chartist contention. He makes no mention of urbanization or industrialization, of transitional strains or disruptions. Instead, he points to the factory workers of industrial capitalism, their urban location, and the consequent class conflicts of interest between them and their capitalist employers:

The factory operatives, and especially those of the cotton district, form the nucleus of the labor movement. Lancashire, and especially Manchester, is the seat of the most powerful Unions, the central point of Chartism.... The more the factory system has taken possession of a branch of industry, the more the working-men employed in it participate in the labor movement; the sharper the opposition between working-men and capitalists, the clearer the proletarian consciousness in the working-men..., in general, all

the workers employed in manufacture are won for... resistance to capital and bourgeoisie, and all are united upon this point, that they, as working-men..., form a separate class, with separate interests and principles, with a separate way of looking at things in contrast with that of all property-owners....<sup>5</sup>

Engels gives the distinct impression that it was "integration" into the urban, industrial capitalist order that determined levels of Chartist contention. Whereas Smelser emphasizes proletarianization (the working class side of industrialization) as the social background for Chartism, Engels stresses proletarianism. In fact, Marx offers a direct challenge to Smelser's type of argument in Capital when he says that "As soon as the working class, stunned at first by the noise and turmoil of the new system of production, had recovered its senses to some extent, it began to offer resistance...."<sup>6</sup> This argument is the reverse of Smelser's. It sees the transition to industrial employment as a period of relative quiet in terms of worker contention.

Engels' and Smelser's differences on the role of factory workers in Chartist contention are indicative of a more fundamental split. It involves the more general problem of the nature of society and collective contention's relation to it. Smelser's arguments about Chartism are most different from Engels' in their emphasis on social change as its basic determinant. The emphasis on change is characteristic of a wide range of "social mobilization" theories of radical collective contention.<sup>7</sup> By briefly probing the theoretical assumptions behind Smelser's argument, we will be able to situate our analysis of Chartism in terms of a basic dispute about collective contention and the nature of society. Of course, evidence

one way or another about Lancashire Chartism in 1842 cannot finally resolve the dispute, but it can indicate the direction such a resolution is likely to take.

If we take the slippery notion of "strains and tensions" to be the rough equivalent of the hardly less slippery one of "social contradictions", then we will notice a slight convergence between Smelser's structural-functional arguments about radical contention and those of Marxists. Smelser, like most Marxists, does identify increases in radical contention with social contradictions. Contrary to Marxists, however, he does not then look to structural class contradictions for his explanation. Instead, his search for explanations immediately turns to processes of structural change such as urbanization and industrialization. The basic reason behind this turn to change is that Smelser's overall conception of society sees it as an integrated, non-contradictory and fundamentally consensual system. If increasing radical collective contention is, as Smelser argues, the result of societal contradictions (strains and tensions) and if societies are basically non-contradictory systems, then the explanation for the contention must somehow lie outside of the social system. Smelser's identification of marginal, transitional or nonintegrated groups as the backbone of Chartist contention is the corollary of these arguments.

What applies to groups also applies to societies; because, in functional theory, structural social change is the result of a social system's lack of integration. That is, social change characterizes a social system in contradiction and in transition.

The theoretical-historical perspective involved here is essentially structural-typological. Urbanization and industrialization are the transitional processes linking rural, pre-industrial society to urban, industrial society. Societies making this transition are similar to groups caught up in it. They are in a nonintegrated, contradictory state--part rural-agrarian, part urban-industrial. They are in a transitional phase between two distinct structural orders. Hence, the well-known argument that transitional societies are much more prone to radical contention than either traditional or modern ones.

In the case of both groups and societies, the critical variables accounting for radical collective contention are then the processes of social change, because change is both the consequence of and the producer of malintegration and contradiction. It is, therefore, a population's or society's relation to processes of structural change that defines its potential for radical collective contention. Once this relation snaps, as Smelser argues it did for factory workers in the late 1830's, the group or society ceases to be transitional; and, consequently, its propensity for radical contention rapidly declines. It has then entered an integrated and non-contradictory state. Smelser sums this up when he says:

It seems to me that it is less embarrassing analytically to interpret cases of outright conflict between the classes as disturbed reactions to specific structural pressures rather than as the manifestations of a permanent state of war between them.<sup>8</sup> (Emphasis added)

One final comment on the theoretical implications of Smelser's interpretation of Chartism is necessary before we move on to a briefer discussion of Engels' view. Smelser does not only see a population's relation to social change as determining its propensity for radical contention. He also sees radical contention as being fundamentally about social change. Moreover, since social change is a structural, systemic process of transitional development, radical collective contention is interpreted as a largely reactionary or backward-looking phenomenon. Support for movements such as Chartism arises "...among groups under pressure..." i.e., from structural change, "...the aims of which are to safeguard or restore those elements of the division of labour which are directly under pressure."<sup>9</sup> The historian Kitson Clark, who shares Smelser's emphasis on urbanization and industrialization as the critical factors defining working class contention, concretizes this argument in relation to Chartism:

What the Chartists desired was no doubt to return to a society of small masters and skilled craftsmen, or at least a stay to the development of large factories and high capitalism....<sup>10</sup>

In short, the contention is not between groups and classes over the distribution of social resources but between groups and the processes of structural change themselves. A form of struggle and contention which perhaps only Don Quixote could completely understand.

Engels' vision is obviously of a radically different kind. Integration into the urban, industrial capitalist order is

for him simultaneously integration into a contradictory, class conflictual society. These structured class contradictions are the axes around which collective contention crystallizes. The contention is between identifiable classes locked into relatively persistent relations of conflict over social resources. Engels would agree with Smelser that the factory worker of the late 1830's and early 1840's was integrated into industrial capitalist society. This integration did not, however, signal the end of a contentious transitional period but marked the beginning of participation in a class related to other classes by structured conflicts of interest. As that participation increases, intraclass bonds strengthen, interclass interest conflicts clarify, and collective contention expands. It is everyday involvement in industrial capitalist society which generates intraclass solidarity and interclass conflict. The argument emphasizes class mobilization rather than social mobilization, class based conflicts of interest rather than struggles against social processes as the keys to understanding radical collective contention. We shall have more to say about this theory later; for now, its differences with Smelser's are apparent enough.

Having distinguished two alternative interpretations of Chartism and related them to their theoretical bases, we now turn to the third, most important part of this section. From now on, we will be concerned with the empirical evaluation of these opposed theories and with the development of a complete

explanation for Chartist contention. First, however, a few remarks about the data on which this is based. The socio-economic data is taken from the usual sources: the Census, Factory Inspectors' reports, and various secondary sources which I will identify at the appropriate points in the discussion. As such, this information requires no discussion. The only really new data presented is that concerning worker collective activity and contention. This information was collected from the Northern Star and represents the first systematic enumeration of working class collective activity and contention for this period of English history. Its presentation and analysis corrects a basic weakness of previous studies of working class action and Chartism. Those studies, even when quantitatively rigorous in other respects such as John Foster's is,<sup>1</sup> have primarily relied upon impressionistic and illustrative information when it comes to the actual patterns and levels of working class action and contention. Consequently, their analyses and discussions of the dynamics of working class contention remain hypotheses at best. Hopefully, the analysis offered here will enable us to settle some questions about the nature of Chartism and working class contention in general at a level of evidential rigor previously unattained.

The events recorded, 791 in all, covering the period from December 25, 1841, to December 16, 1842, or 51 weeks, had to meet two basic criteria for inclusion in the enumeration. They had to involve presumably at least ten people and there had to

be some indication of worker presence at the action. The latter criterion was considered minimally met unless the report in the Northern Star indicated that the participants were other than workers; e.g., rate-payers only, middle class, shopkeepers, etc. The Star appeared to be quite assiduous in identifying actions in which workers were not involved since their exclusion from the collective and political life of the country was its major concern. In the absence of precise numbers of participants, the numeric criterion was considered met whenever the report gave an indication of participants above a "few" or "several" by employing such terms as "numerous", "well attended", "respectably attended", etc.

The collected events were then classified into two basic categories: collective activity and collective contention events. For reasons which will become apparent as the analysis proceeds, I chose not to restrict the enumeration to only those events in which the participants collectively expressed some claim or demand. The collective activity category contains all events in which such claims were not voiced. Therefore, they represent instances when ten or more people, workers included, met for celebrations, lectures, discussions, and so on. They include events such as the meetings of benefit societies, dinners and dances celebrating Henry Hunt's birthday, gatherings to discuss the present distress of workers, scheduled lectures by Chartist agitators, and trade society meetings. In short, they represent an indication of the levels of working class collective life or

mobilization and, as will become apparent later, are an important element in the explanation of Chartist and other forms of working class contention.

Events of collective contention are those which included workers and met Charles Tilly's Great Britain Study's criterion for "contentious gatherings"; i.e., all those "occasions in which ten or more persons outside the government gather in the same place and make a visible claim which, if realized, would effect the interests of some specific person(s) or group(s) outside their own numbers."<sup>12</sup> For the purposes of this study, these contentious gatherings were subdivided into two groups: Chartist contentions and non-Chartist contentions. The Chartist category included all those contentious gatherings in which the visible claim made was for the enactment of the People's Charter into law. Obviously, non-Chartist contentions were all those not involving a demand for the People's Charter. The entire enumeration of collective activities and contentions was aggregated in terms of the parish in which the event occurred, and the parish totals were then converted into the rates of activity and contention per 100,000 population in 1841. All the conversion involves, of course, is the standardization of the parishes in relation to their population differences; a necessary preliminary to the comparative analysis we are undertaking.

Let's begin the analysis by comparing the parishes which had Chartist contention in 1842 with those that did not. We do so in terms of three socio-economic characteristics: (1) Urbanism,

or the proportion of the 1841 population living in cities which by 1841 had 10,000 or more people; (2) Urbanization; i.e., the percent change in urbanism 1831-41; and (3) Industrialism, defined as the percent of the 1841 population that were textile factory workers in 1838. Since the production of textiles was far and away Lancashire's dominant industry, the figures on textile factory workers give a very accurate indication of industrialism. The comparison is set forth in Table 1.<sup>13</sup>

TABLE 1  
Comparison of Parishes with Chartist Contention  
in 1842 and those with none

	No. of <u>Parishes</u>	<u>Urbanism</u>	<u>Urbanization</u>	<u>Industrialism</u>
Contentious Parishes	23	69.4%	+7.3	9.9%
Non-contentious Parishes	38	6.1	+1.3	1.7
Lancashire and Stockport	61	59.6	+6.1	8.7

Clearly, the area of Chartist contention was Lancashire's most urban, urbanizing, and industrial region. Other incomplete evidence indicates that we should also add rapidly industrializing to this list of traits. The rate of growth in the number of textile factory workers, 1835 to 1838, in the contentious area was around 25%. Although precise figures for this are not equally available for the non-contentious parishes, the evidence indicates that their experience was pretty well mixed between



low growth and low decline.<sup>14</sup> About all this aggregate level analysis tells us is that Chartist contention in 1842 was a phenomenon of the dynamic, modern sector of Lancashire society. Table 1 does not provide any assistance in distinguishing the relative merits of Smelser's or Engels' interpretations. Urbanization/industrialization and urbanism/industrialism were equally characteristic of the contentious Chartist region. Hesitatingly, we might conclude that a certain undefined level of "modernization" and/or "modernity" was a necessary condition for Chartist contention.

In any event, the important issue in dispute is not the explanation of whether or not Chartist contention occurred but rather the explanation of variations in its level. Here we will restrict our analysis to the twenty-six parishes for which we have evidence that some collective activity or contention took place. We will be focusing on the relation between the rate of Chartist contention per 100,000 1841 population and the socio-economic explanations proposed for variations in that rate. Smelser's argument is that the rates of urbanization and industrialization were positively related to the level of Chartist contention; i.e., the greater the rate of social change, the higher the levels of radical collective contention. Table 2 presents the zero-order product moment correlation coefficients between level of Chartist contention and urbanization, industrialization and urban growth. Urban growth refers to the rate of change, 1831-41, in the population of parish cities with 10,000 or more people as of 1841. Its inclusion is a direct

TABLE 2<sup>15</sup>

## Social Change and Chartist Contention

	<u>Chartist Contention per 100,000</u>
Urbanization, 1831-41	-.07 (.01)*
Industrialization, 1835-38	-.15 (.02)
Urban Growth, 1831-41	-.27 (.05)

\*The figures in parentheses are the respective coefficients of determination.

extension of Smelser's overall argument and presents no difficulties. Industrialization is the rate of change in the parish's number of textile factory workers, 1835-38.<sup>16</sup> The definition of urbanization is already familiar from Table 1.

Smelser is obviously on the wrong track. His argument that urbanization and industrialization positively influenced Chartist contention is false. Instead, they were negatively related to it. That is, the more a parish was caught up in the processes of social change, the less was its level of Chartist contention. The low values of the coefficients suggest that the processes of social change Smelser identifies had little bearing at all on Chartist contention. Be that as it may, the presumed social contradictions of transitional societies were not the ones generating Chartist contention in 1842 Lancashire. If anything, they were operating so as to reduce it. The relationship of a population to system level processes of change is just not a

meaningful one when it comes to determining levels of collective contention. Apparently, there are much more significant and prosaic factors at work than these system processes. It does not make sense to think of radical collective contention as structured by and framed in terms of macro-processes of structural transformation. We can, in light of Table 2, confidently conclude that social change was not the critical determinant of Chartist contention.

Our knowing that Smelser is on the wrong track does not, of course, tell us that Engels was on the right one. If we are willing to accept industrialism and urbanism as fair approximations of Engels' idea of the extent to which the factory has taken hold of an area, then Table 3 presents their relation to Chartist contention. The table includes an additional explanatory variable--textile factory workers per 1,000 acres in 1838.<sup>17</sup> It indicates the level of factory proletarian concentration in a parish. A quick glance at Table 3 points up its sharp contrast with Table 2. At least, all of the relations are in the direction one would expect from Engels' analysis. The one insignificant relationship is between urbanism and Chartist contention. This is somewhat surprising in light of existing evidence on the relatively strong relation between urbanism and collective contention. Actually, the usual argument about urbanism and collective contention is that the urban environment significantly reduces the costs of organizing and mobilizing people for contention. Obviously, for urbanism to be relevant to any

TABLE 3  
Industrialism, Urbanism, and  
Chartist Contention

	<u>Chartist Contention per 100,000</u>
Urbanism	+.07 (.01)
Industrialism	+.52 (.27)
Textile Factory Worker per 1,000 acres	+.60 (.36)

particular contention, the people in the city would have to be a "target" group of the contention. In the case of Chartism, urbanism did not have a significant direct effect. Later, we will see that it did, however, have some indirect effect on Chartist contention.

It was not so much living in the city as working in the factory that was important for Chartism. This point is graphically illustrated by a comparison of Liverpool and Manchester. Liverpool was a commercial city without any textile factories; and, in 1842, it did not have a single instance of Chartist contention. Manchester, on the other hand, had over thirty thousand textile factory workers, roughly ten percent of its total population, and thirty-three large-scale Chartist contentions. Urbanism performs much like the other sociological variables of urbanization and urban growth. They are all relatively insignificant in relation to Chartist contention. Conversely, the two variables framed in terms of factory workers are quite significant

in relation to it. Moreover, of these two, the level of a parish's proletarian concentration is the more important. The point is that Chartist contention was not a general social phenomenon; it was, instead, grounded in a particular class or group defined primarily by their position within the economic structure. To this point, then, all the evidence points to an area's economic structure and not to its social structure or processes as what was important for Chartist contention in 1842. Engels was apparently on the right track.

The evidence so far indicates that Chartist contention was a phenomenon structured by the economically determined class situation of textile factory workers. But as Max Weber pointed out long ago, the class situation does not invariably result in collective contention. If it did, we would be hard pressed to account for either the fluctuations in Chartist contention during 1842 or that year's high levels of it in comparison with other years.<sup>18</sup> The class situation of textile factory proletarians was just that--a situation. Yet, if we have learned anything about the dynamics of collective contention, it is that much more than sharing an objective situation is involved in its determination. All we know now is that there was something in the situation of textile factory proletarians which was directly relevant to Chartism. What we do not know is what this something was and how it was relevant. Before we can answer these questions, it will be necessary to situate Chartist contention within the overall pattern of worker collective activity and contention.

The first step is to lay out the quantitative evidence and hope that it will provide some leads to explanation. Tables 4 and 5 do this: Table 4, in terms of the sociological framework advanced by Smelser; and Table 5 in terms of the more fruitful economic and class one. Table 4 is representative of social mobilization theories of radical contention. To the variables already considered, we have added literacy. It is taken from a study by Michael Sanderson and represents the proportion of people able to sign their names to parish marriage registers in 1837-39.<sup>19</sup> Literacy, like urbanization, industrialization, and urban growth, occupies a central place in theories of contention that emphasize social change or social mobilization. Its expansion is just one more element of the transition to the "modern" world. Table 4 shows that these modernization theories have little relevance to any of the forms of worker collective activity and contention in 1842. In fact, the strongest relations are in the opposite direction from what they predict. The negative evidence regarding literacy does, however, tell us something. Sanderson demonstrates that textile factory work was among the most illiterate occupations in Lancashire at this time.<sup>20</sup> Our own analysis shows that the correlation between the percent of population textile factory workers and percent literate was  $-.65$ . Once again, we are back to the factory proletariat.

Table 5 presents the relations between collective activity/contention and proletarian concentration, urbanism.

TABLE 4

Social Mobilization and Working Class  
Collective Activity and Contention

	<u>Chartist Contention</u>	<u>Non-Chartist Contention</u>	<u>Collective Activity</u>
Urbanization	-.07 (.01)	+.16 (.03)	+.17 (.03)
Urban Growth	-.27 (.05)	+.11 (.02)	+.12 (.02)
Industrialization	-.15 (.02)	-.10 (.01)	-.32 (.10)
Literacy	-.11 (.02)	-.45 (.20)	-.27 (.07)

It also shows the relationship between Chartist contention, non-Chartist contention and collective activity. (All relationships are non-spurious.) The evidence is unambiguous. If one wants to account for Chartist contention, class mobilization and not social mobilization is the key. Once again, the weakest explanatory factor is urbanism; but, nevertheless, it does have an independent effect on non-Chartist contention and collective activity. Proletarian concentration remains the best predictor across the entire range of worker collective activity and contention. There is, however, one significant qualification. The single best predictor of Chartist contention is non-Chartist contention. The picture which begins to emerge from Table 5 suggests an explanation of Chartism much more complex than a simple, direct, class situation → Chartist contention argument. In fact, the second order partial between Chartist contention and proletarian concentration when we "control" for collective

TABLE 5

Class Mobilization and Working Class  
Activity and Contention

	<u>Chartist Contention</u>	<u>Non-Chartist Contention</u>	<u>Collective Activity</u>
Proletarian Concentration	+.60 (.36)	+.80 (.64)	+.79 (.62)
Urbanism	+.07 (.01)	+.38 (.11)	+.28 (.08)
Collective Activity	+.50 (.25)	+.68 (.46)	
Non-Chartist Contention	+.64 (.41)		

activity and non-Chartist contention is only +.16.<sup>21</sup> This suggests that in between the class situation of factory proletarians and Chartist contention was the process of class mobilization. The time has come to shift away from economic structure to the more political and conjunctural factors which influence mobilization for contention. We may sum up by saying that industrial capitalism, by concentrating factory proletarians, created the foundations for class mobilization and therefore for Chartist contention. How all of these connections occurred is what we will now be concerned with.

Eighteen forty-two was, to put it mildly, not a good year. The textile industry was in a depression. R.C.O. Matthews has argued that 1841-42 were the only years between 1833 and 1842 in which the industry was seriously depressed.<sup>22</sup> He shows that in previous slumps manufacturers had absorbed much of the costs of diminishing markets. Consequently, by 1842 they were already experiencing considerable downward pressure on profits: "...many

entrepreneurs faced the further deterioration in trade in 1841-42 with their reserves already almost exhausted."<sup>23</sup> Whereas "...entrepreneurs suffered greater proportional loss in money earnings between 1837 and 1840 than the operatives...", in 1842 they turned the balance and shifted the costs of diminishing trade onto the workers.<sup>24</sup> The result was about twenty percent unemployment, the imposition of short-term hours on an equal number of workers, and wage-rate reductions which ranged between ten and twenty percent or more.<sup>25</sup> In short, the conflict between the profits of capital and the wages of labor had, by 1842, reached an intense and open phase.

The structural conflict between capital and labor was conjuncturally converted into a transparent conflict between employers and workers. The result was the dual development of increasing intraclass solidarity and accentuated interclass hostility. Structural conflicts became increasingly real and transparent through their translation into immediate and compelling struggles around basic needs.<sup>26</sup> The lay-offs, slow-downs, and wage reductions created basic contingencies of material life for the workers. The fact that all of these contingencies could be directly linked to the actions of employers meant immediate personification of conflicts. The overall development might be characterized as the "everydaying" of structural conflicts through their reduction to contingencies of material life.

We are fortunate to have a primary source that allows us to catch a good glimpse into these developments. W. Cooke

Taylor travelled throughout Lancashire in 1842 spending much of his time in conversation with textile workers. The first thing he noted was how their situation was leading them to differentiate their interests from others' and to recognize the need for class action to pursue those interests. At Colne, he found Chartism to be developing with "fearful rapidity" among workers who had told him

"We used to think that something better would turn up, but we have waited so long that hope itself is worn out: we must do something for ourselves, because those above us will never do anything for us." Connected with this subject, I may remark on the rapidity with which political intelligence appears to be promulgated in this district.<sup>27</sup>

At another place, Taylor gave the sick child of an unemployed worker sixpence, which elicited from her father the sarcastic remark, "I am sure you are poor yourself, or you would not be charitable."<sup>28</sup> Over and over again, Taylor emphasizes how their present difficulties were driving workers to a greater reliance on one another and a greater disdain for all those "above" them.

Taylor sees how the material situation of the workers led to the development of "...a dangerous and increasing chasm between the employers and the employed."<sup>29</sup> Confirming his own dislike for Chartists and other working class leaders, he nevertheless perceived how this "chasm" provided them with fertile territory in which to work.

The operatives, thus abandoned by their natural guides, were left free to follow any leaders that offered,--Unionists, Chartists, and political adventurers of every grade and description.<sup>30</sup>

It was not only those who were unemployed that joined the Chartist movement, but the larger numbers who had some employment were gripped by "a fearful looking forward to the future".<sup>31</sup> Finally, one more quote which makes the point with effective imagery:

I saw many a wheel idle and many a chimney smokeless; as a consequence, I find the village for the most part tenanted by a poverty-stricken population. Having entered into conversation with some of the unemployed operatives, I found that here, as elsewhere, they were determined Chartists.<sup>32</sup>

We can see that Taylor has a sort of "contagion" model of Chartism in mind.<sup>33</sup> He points to how the economic situation of 1842 led to the strengthening of intraclass bonds and the heightening of interclass hostilities. Now these, in turn, created the interest and social space ("chasm") in which Chartist agitation could thrive. It is extremely difficult to bring any level of sufficient quantitative evidence to bear on this issue. The only thing we can do is to provide a fragment of information which suggests the accuracy of the argument we have been making. The evidence relates to how the economic conjuncture and its everyday consequences influenced the relative efficiency of Chartist agitation. We can only hypothesize that the intermediate processes were the ones of intraclass bonding and interclass polarization that the argument suggests. Taylor, however, provides good evidence that they were. In any event, we are operating in the realm of attenuated plausibility.

The over five hundred instances of collective activity in the enumeration include two hundred twenty-three gatherings

where at least one of the speakers directly advocated the People's Charter. The speakers involved were generally Chartist leaders and activists, and therefore it makes sense to see these events as agitation. The object of agitation was obviously to create support and ultimately Chartist contention. If we take the efficiency of that agitation to be measurable in terms of the ratio of agitational gatherings to Chartist contentions, then we can evaluate how the economic situation influenced that efficiency. We have unemployment data for only ten parishes; and, when we look at it in relation to agitational efficiency, we get Table 6.<sup>34</sup> It suggests that the parishes where unemployment was greater were indeed more fertile grounds for agitation. Especially when one notes that their levels of proletarian concentration were the reverse of what

TABLE 6  
Unemployment and the Efficiency  
of Chartist Agitation

<u>Percent Unemployed</u>	<u>Actual Range of Unemployment</u>	<u>Number of Parishes</u>	<u>Proletarian Concentration</u>	<u>Ratio of Contentions to Agitations</u>
20% or greater	21-25%	6	240.1	1:1.68
18% or less	10-18%	4	613.4	1:3.95

one would expect. Chartist agitators were more than twice as likely to create Chartist contention in the group of parishes with higher unemployment.

The evidence of Table 6 not only suggests the accuracy of our arguments but also confirms the wisdom of Fergus O'Connor's Northern Star article on "A Few Words on Propagandism and Organization":

Our mission is with the sons of poverty and suffering; from them we must gain converts and disciples. Wherever oppression and tyranny exist on the part of the landlord, the master and the manufacturer, there should our missionary be, ...taking advantage of it to raise scorn and contempt in the minds of the people against the present accursed system. When man suffers from wrong and oppression his mind is doubly open to conviction of the divine principles of truth and justice.<sup>35</sup>

The conjunctural circumstances of 1842 played a major role in the development of a "class for itself". A class which perceived itself as bonded together by a set of circumstances and interests that were opposed to those of other classes. A class which was mobilizing around these interests and oppositions and which found in Chartism a program and a message refracted through their everyday lives.

There was a series of events that graphically illustrated the dual importance of polarizing class formations and a worker-based political organization for Chartist contention. Chartists were not the only organized political group seeking working class allegiance in 1842. There was also the manufacturer-dominated and financed Anti-Corn Law League. Its program called for the repeal of the Corn Laws and free trade in grain. The

League was attempting the old strategy of mobilizing a working class "tail" to force the landholding aristocracy into abolishing agricultural duties. The Chartists saw this as a simple attempt to deflect working class action from the real problem of achieving political power to a narrow, middle-class program. They argued that the Corn Laws were just one example of class legislation; that the declining condition of workers put the lie to the League's argument that the expansion of markets resulting from free trade would benefit workers through increased production; and that the cheaper bread which would result from free trade actually meant that employers would reduce wages.<sup>36</sup>

Our enumeration contains eighteen occasions on which the League and the Chartists directly confronted each other at "public" meetings. All the meetings were called on League initiative and none were planned as direct debates between Leaguers and Chartists. Of the eighteen meetings, the Chartists with worker support managed to defeat resolutions for repeal and pass resolutions for the Charter on twelve occasions. Three of the confrontations ended in compromise resolutions and three in League victories (Table 7). Two-thirds of these confrontations took place in February and March. It was, of course, in February that Peel introduced his budget in Parliament with its call for a sliding scale on corn import duties. A proposal which was anathema to the League which demanded nothing short of total abolition. Here we see a direct example of the Parliamentary agenda initiating the mobilization of an issue-oriented political

TABLE 7

Chartist and Anti-Corn Law League  
Confrontations and Their Result

<u>Number of Confrontations</u>	<u>Chartist Victories</u>	<u>League Victories</u>	<u>Compromise Resolutions</u>
18	12	3	3

organization. The League's mobilization and attempt to gain worker support led in turn to the competitive mobilization of the Chartists. This spiralling process of mobilization and counter-mobilization resulted in heightened levels of contention (see Figure 1, p.35) and in Chartist gains.

The way the polarized class divisions of 1842 entered into these Chartist victories can be illustrated by a Manchester meeting. The League called the meeting by placard; and, when it finally got under way, there were ten thousand people assembled in Stephenson's Square. Mr. Birch of the League opened the meeting stating that the abolition of the corn laws by extending commerce would bring an end to the present distress. He emphasized the unity of interests between manufacturers and workers on this question and the narrow class selfishness of the aristocracy in opposing them. He then proposed a resolution committing the meeting to repeal of the Corn Laws. The Chartist James Leach then rose amidst the cheers of the crowd and argued that England had had numerous extensions of commerce, but the workers were still in misery. He then voiced opposition to Birch's resolution and proposed a counter-resolution for the Charter by saying:

Birch had endeavored hard to convince you that your interests and the interests of the middle classes were the same.... Then I want to know what is the reason they will not give you the same rights as they enjoy, if your interests are identical? <sup>37</sup>

That clinched it. Birch's resolution was defeated, and the crowd declared for the Charter. The class fissures of society were an inescapable feature of the political landscape.

This was so much the case that the League decided to temporarily withdraw from the unrewarding arena of public agitation. We have already noted that two-thirds of the League/Chartist confrontations occurred in February and March. During that period, the League lost eight, won two, and two ended in compromise. The Anti-Corn Law League met in Manchester on March 22 to evaluate the progress of their agitation. They decided that further open agitation should be drastically curtailed since experience showed that it was only benefiting the Chartist. <sup>38</sup> The combination of an economic situation that polarized the classes and a political organization committed to working-class interests destroyed the possibility of an "old style" middle class-working class coalition. Nor was this overall play of class political forces one determined by the pure exigencies of the moment. It was the result of a long-standing policy of the National Charter Association. At the founding of that body in 1840, its constitution contained the following injunction:

The Members of this Association shall also attend all public Political Meetings, and there, either by moving amendments, or by other means, enforce a discussion of our rights and claims, so that none may remain in ignorance of what we want, nor have an



opportunity of propagating or perpetuating political ignorance or delusion.<sup>39</sup>

Behind the blank numeric mask of the correlation between Chartist and non-Chartist contention, there was the political reality of mobilizing and counter-mobilizing political organizations struggling to achieve class allegiances and to further concrete interests. Structurally defined groups caught up in a conjuncturely accentuated process of interest differentiation and polarization, interconnected with consciously directed political organizations to create the Chartist contention of 1842. Not structure alone, conjuncture alone, or politics alone but all three together created the radical collective contention Chartism represented. This indicates that if theories of collective contention are to be any good, they must be framed in terms of all three of these levels. And to do this, they must get down into the contingent ebb and flow of concrete historical reality. As we proceed, this dictum will become even more compelling.

### III

Readers familiar with nineteenth-century English history have, no doubt, noticed a glaring omission from the discussion. Nothing has been said about what are generally taken to be the most significant events of 1842--the "Plug Plot Riots". In Lancashire, at least, these "riots" are justifiably identified as industrial Europe's first political mass strike. The reason we have postponed discussion of the August strike until now was to allow its situation within the overall argument. We wanted to be able to see the events of August as they fitted into the general political dynamics of 1842. The last section developed a comparative analysis of the roots of Chartist contention, emphasizing the process of class mobilization and the role political organization played in it. The strike was directly related to these dynamics, but it also presents a remarkable example of their opposite: demobilization through repression.

The general strike of August began at Staleybridge on August 5.<sup>40</sup> Its immediate cause was the announcement of a wage reduction at Bayley's cotton factory. At that, the workers stopped work, left the mill and formed into a procession. They then marched to the nearby towns of Ashton, Hyde, and Oldham where virtually all of the textile workers turned out and joined the march. The strike had begun. Actually, it was not as spontaneous as it appears. In late July, some employers in Ashton had threatened a wage reduction. This set off a series

of workers' meetings in Ashton, Staleybridge, and Hyde where they decided that, if the reduction actually occurred, they would all go on strike. On August 4, the Ashton employers withdrew their threat, but Bayley's nevertheless carried out a reduction on the 5th. The workers had therefore already decided to strike for "a fair day's wages for a fair day's work" when Bayley's enacted the decision on the 5th. The argument which clinched the demand for solidarity between towns was that given the logic of the competitive market, a reduction in one would quickly have become a reduction for all. Apparently, the universalizing logic of the market also tends to universalize struggles within it.

By the 9th of August, the strike was general in the Ashton, Staleybridge, Oldham, and Duckinfield areas. On that day, forty thousand of the strikers met in Ashton and decided to march on Manchester and confront the manufacturers directly at the cotton exchange. More mills were turned out en route to Manchester; but, on arrival at the outskirts of the city, the police succeeded in deftly manouvering the crowd away from the exchange and to Granby Row Fields where they held another meeting. After about an hour of speechmaking, they marched back to their towns. Their presence in Manchester, however, initiated a series of turn-outs there which would continue off and on until late September. The August 9 meeting in Ashton not only produced the Manchester march. It also elected six emissaries who were to travel to north Lancashire and convince workers there of the need for unity in the strike. We can

identify two of these emissaries, both members of the National Charter Association, in Preston on the 12th where they addressed workers on the need to make the strike general. Strikes and turn-outs did occur in Preston on the 13th, but there is not any evidence that the delegates from the South were directly involved.<sup>41</sup>

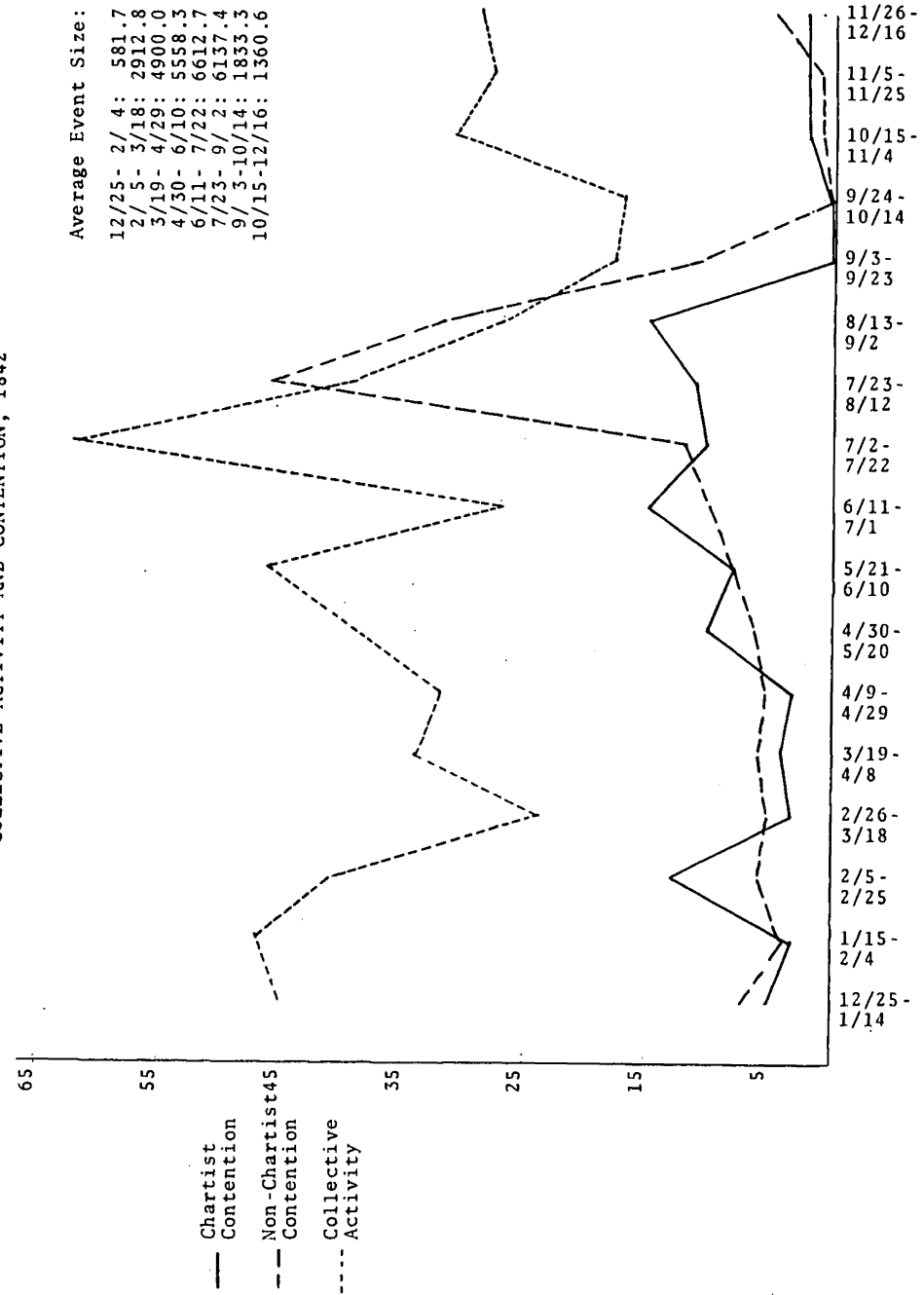
In any event, the Northern Star reports strikes and turn-outs by the 12th of August at Bolton, Heywood, Rochdale, Bury, Burnley, Stockport, and Todmorden. By the 15th, they had spread further into Bacup, Chorley, Wigan, and numerous other areas.<sup>42</sup> The strike had by then become pretty much general throughout Lancashire. Its mode of extension conformed in large part to the pattern in the Ashton area. A group of workers would strike, form into procession, and travel about turning out other workers. Between the 10th and the 15th of August, the strike also took on a political character. Meetings of strikers added to their demand for "a fair day's wages" the demand that the People's Charter become the law of the land. Votes to this effect had occurred in Ashton, Staleybridge, Wigan, Manchester, Hyde, Stockport, Oldham, Burnley, Chorley, and other places. The wage strike of August 5 had, by the 15th, become a political mass strike.

Three points about the relation of the strike to prior developments should be made before we turn to a closer analysis of its internal dynamics. The first thing of note is its situation in relation to the overall pattern of activity and

contention in 1842. May, June, and July were months during which worker collective activity and contention were on the upsurge both in terms of instances and size. Figure 1 presents the three-week swings in worker activity and contention for the year. The May-June-July upward trend coincides with the meeting of the National Chartist Convention in London, the presentation of the National Petition demanding the Charter to Parliament (May 1) and Parliament's quick and decisive vote against giving the Petition consideration. It was a period of political mobilization that culminated in the direct presentation of Chartist demands to the governing bodies of England and their unambiguous political defeat. The increase of Chartist contention in June and July represented an intense mobilization in the wake of political defeat. If the economic situation accentuated class divisions at the level of material life, the political defeat of May must have added salt to an already festering wound.

The June-July rise in collective activity, non-Chartist and Chartist contention centered on this defeat. The collective activity gatherings were dominated by discussions of the present miseries of the people and the unjust system of class legislation. The non-Chartist contentions were primarily meetings expressing confidence in and support of the Chartist leadership and thanks to T.S. Duncombe, M.P. for his support of the Charter in the House of Commons. The Chartist contentions centered on the adoption of two measures proposed by the National Convention in the wake of defeat. Large public meetings sent forth a

FIGURE 1  
THREE-WEEK FLUCTUATIONS IN WORKING CLASS  
COLLECTIVE ACTIVITY AND CONTENTION, 1842



Memorial to the Queen calling for the dismissal of the Peel ministry and appointment of one that would make the Charter a cabinet measure. The second measure was a Remonstrance to the House of Commons, the language of which directly expresses the class divisions and wounds of 1842. After opening with a discussion of how the annual production of wealth is increasing, while the condition of the working class is worsening, the Remonstrance goes on to say that this is

an anomaly not to be accounted for but in the monopoly of political power, the unjust usurpation of authority, and the consequent bad government of the nation;

That the great mass of the people are denied the right of representation in Parliament, and the present House of Commons, being elected by a limited class, legislates only for the interests of that class, to the utter ruin of the great majority of the people....<sup>43</sup>

Language such as this, during a period of intense mobilization and economic misery, could not help but increase class polarization.

The second important development in the May to July period was the recruitment of trade unions as bodies into the National Charter Association. This relatively new recruitment involved a simple and, in 1842, compelling set of arguments and a process of linked recruitment. An example from Manchester will provide the necessary outlines. In early May, the Chartist McDougall addressed the carpenters and joiners of Manchester on the necessity of political power if unions were to be successful. The carpenters and joiners then voted to enroll in the National Charter Association. The fustian cutters followed in late May;

the mechanics, in early June; the smiths, on June 15; and the hammermen, in July. In the case of the fustian cutters and mechanics, delegates from the carpenters and joiners addressed their meetings in support of joining the NCA. At the meetings of the smiths and hammermen, delegates from both the mechanics and carpenters and joiners advocated the move.<sup>44</sup> The period before August, then, was one during which trade unions were turning to the Charter; and, as one did, it attempted to recruit others to do likewise.

The arguments advanced in favor of joining the NCA were directly attuned to the economic situation of workers in 1842. We have already noted the pressure employers were putting on wages. The Northern Star reported wage reductions in 1842 at Chorley, Colne, Crompton, Stockport, Blackburn, Manchester, Wigan; and this list must only scratch the surface. Moreover, it was wage reductions that set off the August strike. The argument Chartists made to trade unionists and trade unionists made to each other echoed a May address of Blackburn's Chartists to the trade unions of that town. It argued that trade unions were established to protect the wages and conditions of labor but that the present conditions and numerous wage reductions demonstrated their failure. The remedy was to join the NCA and "strike at the heart of the problem--class legislation".<sup>45</sup> The Manchester mechanics made essentially the same argument to the hammermen on July 12, saying that they

had found that the trades' unions had not accomplished that for which they had been formed, namely the protection of the labour of the working

man; and, therefore, they had come to the conclusion that nothing short of a participation in the making of the laws...would effectively protect their labor.<sup>46</sup>

The economic conjuncture of 1842 was a major element leading to the pre-August politicization of the trade union movement. Not only workers but working class organizations were being mobilized and politicized during the May to July period.

The third point we have to make brings us back to the immediate events of the mass strike of August, 1842. When one looks at the centers of diffusion for the strike; i.e., those towns where strikes originated and from which workers then formed into turn-out "mobs" and extended it into other areas, one thing is apparent: They were towns whose pre-August levels of worker collective activity and contention were remarkably high. Ashton, Staleybridge, Rochdale, Burnley, Bury, Stockport, and Oldham had levels of collective activity and contention around two times greater than the remaining active/contentious areas. Table 7 presents the evidence for this. The strike expanded out from

TABLE 7

Comparison of Centers of Strike Diffusion  
And Remaining Active/Contentious Areas  
In Terms of Collective Activity and Contention  
Per 100,000

	<u>Collective Activity</u>	<u>Chartist Contention</u>	<u>Non-Chartist Contention</u>
Towns of Strike Diffusion	66.9	9.0	8.5
Other Active/Contentious Areas	30.9	4.8	5.6

the most mobilized and politically contentious working class areas to those which were less mobilized and contentious.

The political mass strike of August was an ecological example of the leadership functions of a class "vanguard". It was, for a while, very successful; but, as we shall see in a moment, there was an even more organized and powerful opponent. Nevertheless, the three points we have been making about the relation of the August strike to previous politico-economic developments dovetail nicely with Rosa Luxemburg's observation that

With the spreading, clarifying and involution of the political struggle the economic struggle not merely does not recede, but extends, organizes and becomes involved in equal measure. Between the two there is the most complete reciprocal action.<sup>47</sup>

The time has come to take a closer look at the internal dynamics of the August political mass strike. The focus will be on them in relation to an actor that has been conspicuously absent until this point--the state. We will show how state organized repression dramatically reversed the pattern of strike expansion and ultimately produced the rapid demobilization of Lancashire workers. Before turning to the evidence on repression, a few background remarks are necessary. The August strike extended from July 26 to August 30. Earlier, we noted that the strike became increasingly Chartist from the 10th to the 15th of August. Actually, the decisive moment that tied the strike to the Charter came on August 12. That was the day when more than two hundred delegates, representing

twenty-five trades and more than twenty localities, met in Manchester and voted to strike for the People's Charter.<sup>48</sup>

August 12 also marked the end of the Home Office's non-repressive stance toward the strike. With the exception of Manchester, Lancashire was a very poorly policed county. If local authorities were to deal with any large-scale disturbances, they had to rely on the military. Its domestic activities were, however, controlled by the Home Office. On August 13, at the Home Secretary's request, the Queen issued a proclamation offering a £50 reward for the apprehension and conviction of the "authors, abettors, or perpetrators" of any act of turn-out violence. The Home Secretary forwarded instructions to the military commanders and magistrates of Lancashire that they should forcibly resist any further turn-out actions and "protect Englishmen in the pursuit of their lawful occupations."<sup>49</sup> Consequently, the July 26-August 30 strike period divides nicely into two segments. July 26 to August 12 was a predominantly repression-free period, and August 13 to August 30 was one of active state repression.<sup>50</sup>

We have already discussed the critical role turn-out mobs played in extending the strike. Now, we will look at the dynamics of turn-out actions and repression's effect on them. The turn-out action represents a variant of what Eric Hobsbawm has called "collective bargaining by riot."<sup>51</sup> When workers lack the organizational resources of large unions, the strike is a very difficult action to pursue. It is even more difficult if attempted during a period of high unemployment.

August, 1842 was characterized by both circumstances. The turn-out action represents a tactic which is well adapted to this type of situation. It involves a group of workers on strike forming themselves into a "mob" and marching from factory to factory to stop other workers from working. A basic aspect of the turn-out action is, of course, the more or less explicit threat of violence against those who refuse to join the strike.

Of the forty-eight cases of turn-out actions in the enumeration, only four involved direct violence against other workers. The normal pattern was for the turn-out mob to confront the owner or manager of a mill and demand that he stop the works and turn-out his employees. The demand would be accompanied by threats to "tear down the mill" or to give the owner-manager a good beating. If the workers turned out either on their own (most common) or on their bosses' initiative, there was not any violence or property damage. Resistance to the turn-out's demands led to the smashing of windows, the stopping of machinery by drawing out the boiler plugs (hence, "Plug Plot"), or the more or less violent thrusting aside of the manager and forcible entry into the mill to drive the workers out. The action did not, however, extend to the destruction of machinery or mill. It was directed only at insuring the cessation of labor.

Since "labor power" was about the only significant resource Lancashire workers had at this time, the distribution of control over it was crucial for the pursuit of working class demands. Our earlier analysis of the strike's diffusion indicated that the turn-out action was a means for "vanguard" workers to

achieve control over this collective resource for purposes of contention. Their effectiveness ultimately depended on having relatively free access to other workers and being able to persuade or coerce them or their employers into compliance with their demands. This effectiveness in turn rested on the absence of a countervailing force capable of denying them that access. The high unemployment of 1842 meant that there was an enormous pool of workers whose material situation could quickly make them into strikebreakers. The workers' lack of "strike funds" therefore gave employers a decided advantage in that through wages they controlled access to the means of subsistence. It was probably this fact which directed the turn-out's threats and violence toward the employers. They were their most immediate rivals in the struggle for control over the collective labor power of the working class. Control by the turn-outs meant commitment of that resource to the struggle for political democracy. Control by the employers meant the weakening of that struggle.

The change in repressive policy of August 13 provided, in the shape of the military, a countervailing force capable of prohibiting turn-out access to other workers. Ultimately, it returned dominant control over the collective labor power of the working class to the employers while simultaneously maintaining the dominance of property in the state. That is, it destroyed a serious democratic challenge to the existing liberal state and its restricted property franchise. We can read the record of

this in the turn-out actions on which we have evidence. First, some definitions:

A turn-out action is a collective action by one group of workers on strike to attempt to prohibit the working of another employed group of workers. A successful turn-out action occurs when the previously employed workers immediately cease working as a direct result of the first group of workers' turn-out action. A turn-out failure occurs when the employed workers remain at work in the face of the turn-out action.

An enforcing turn-out action is a turn-out action which occurs at a workplace that had either been previously on strike or the target of a previous successful turn-out action but is now back in operation.

Strikes taken by workers on their own initiative and without the immediate presence of a turn-out mob are not counted as turn-out actions.

Police actions are defined as any active intervention by the repressive agents of the state into an ongoing turn-out action.

Table 8 presents the basic figures on the number of turn-out actions of all types and the number where there were police actions. The Home Office policy change of the 13th was much more than symbolic. The proportion of turn-out actions with active police intervention was more than four times greater in the second, repressive period. Obviously, the configuration of forces at turn-out actions was quite different depending on

TABLE 8

## Police Actions and Turn-Out Actions

<u>Period</u>	<u>Number of Turn-Out Actions</u>	<u>Number of Turn-Out Actions With Police Action</u>	<u>% of Turn-Out Actions with Police Actions</u>
7/26-8/12	26	4	15
8/13-8/30	22	14	64
7/26-8/30	48	18	38

whether they occurred between July 26 and August 12 or between August 13 and 30. The problem is to discern what, if any, effect this changed configuration of forces had on the success rate of turn-out actions.

We have sufficient information on thirty-eight turn-out actions to determine whether they were successes or failures. Table 9 presents this information in relation to police action or repression. The evidence is unambiguous. Fully 88% of the turn-out failures can be attributed to police action. Throughout the entire strike, there were only two successful turn-out actions where there was also police action. In fact, the two cases of failure without police action were the result of manufacturers deploying their own armed guards. The significance of the changed repressive policy adopted by the Home Office is apparent in the drop in the turn-out success rate from 75% in the July 26-August 12 period to 39% in the second, repressive period. Clearly, the repressive forces of the state operated

TABLE 9

## Success and Failure of Turn-outs With and Without Police Action

<u>Period</u>	<u>Turn-Outs Without Police Action</u>		<u>Turn-Outs With Police Action</u>	
	<u>Success</u>	<u>Failure</u>	<u>Success</u>	<u>Failure</u>
7/26-8/12				
Turn-Out Actions	13	1	0	4
Enforcing Turn-Out Actions	<u>2</u>	<u>0</u>	<u>0</u>	<u>0</u>
All Turn-Outs	15	1	0	4
8/13-8/30				
Turn-Out Actions	4	1	2	6
Enforcing Turn-Out Actions	<u>1</u>	<u>0</u>	<u>0</u>	<u>4</u>
All Turn-Outs	5	1	2	10
7/26-8/30				
Turn-Out Actions	17	2	2	10
Enforcing Turn-Out Actions	<u>3</u>	<u>0</u>	<u>0</u>	<u>4</u>
All Turn-Outs	20	2	2	14

to deny turn-out workers access to and control over the collective labor power of their class.

The distinction between turn-out actions and enforcing turn-out actions permits a better perspective on the role repression played. Successful turn-out actions represented increases in the mobilization of working class resources for collective contention. Enforcing turn-out actions, on the other hand, were attempts to



maintain an already obtained level of resource mobilization in the face of actual declines. The effects of the changed repressive policy can now be seen in a somewhat different light. The relatively repression-free period was one in which Lancashire workers achieved impressive gains in resource mobilization for the pursuit of their economic and political demands. There were only two enforcing actions during that period, and they were successful. In short, the non-repressive July 26-August 12 period mirrored the entire May to July expansion of resource mobilization and contention with little evidence of decline.

The thirteen turn-out actions which occurred in the second, repressive period all happened between August 13 and 18. Their success rate was 46% compared to 72% in the former period. Clearly, mobilization was becoming a much more difficult and costly endeavor. In fact, after August 18 the workers were no longer increasing their level of resource mobilization at all. Instead, they were attempting to maintain previously achieved mobilization levels. An attempt which repression made into a failure. After August 18, enforcing turn-outs dominated the scene; and police actions insured that 80% of these efforts to maintain mobilization failed. The lesson had been driven home by the 20th when speakers at a strike meeting in Middleton warned the workers not to interfere with those returning to work, because "the authorities would come down on them".<sup>52</sup> The issue was finally sealed when the Trade Delegates meeting that had declared the strike for the Charter on August 12 issued its

final address on August 27, announcing an end to the strike saying they must wait until they had developed sufficient organization and resources.<sup>53</sup> That is, after August 18 repression was rapidly demobilizing the Lancashire working class.

How rapidly can be seen by a glance back at Figure 1 (p. 35). Both collective activity and especially contention dipped to their lowest yearly level. This fact goes a long way toward justifying the emphasis we have been placing on political leadership, organization, and agitation as critical to mobilization and contention. Starting on August 17, repression was not only directed against turn-outs but was also reflected in the large-scale arrest of trade union and Chartist leaders. These arrests would continue into October with trials at Salford, Liverpool, and York, involving more than three hundred defendants. The core Chartist leadership was bound over for trial at Lancashire in the following spring. When one compares the list of defendants with the list of people who had taken leading roles in the collective gatherings of the year, it is clear that the arrests had emasculated Lancashire's working class leadership. Agitation and mobilization had, in fact, ceased to be the primary concern of the National Charter Association. On September 24, its Executive Council defined the organization's primary task as the raising of defense funds for the arrested.<sup>54</sup> The political forces of repression had overwhelmed the political forces of mobilization and had, therefore, largely destroyed the basis of working class activity and contention. The clearing of Chartists from the

political landscape is graphically, if somewhat disconcertedly, apparent in the October 27 reversal of the Anti-Corn Law League's position on public agitation. At a Manchester meeting that day the League decided, contrary to its March 22 position, that public agitation should be increased.<sup>55</sup> Politics obviously involves seizing one's opportunities.

A few final remarks about the strike of 1842 are apposite since they return us to the factory worker issue. A comparison of the strike of 1842 with Luddism (1811-12) and the Lancashire handloom-weavers' "strike" of 1826 is enlightening.<sup>56</sup> Without going into detail, we may note some of the significant differences between these cases of large-scale working class action. The first point concerns the breadth of action. In 1811-12 and 1826, workers selectively directed their attacks against low quality, low paying and/or recently mechanized firms. That is, they attempted either to bring specific employers into line on the questions of wages and product quality or to eliminate new productive machinery. Eighteen forty-two had none of this selectivity. The workers attempted to turn-out all mills irregardless of wage differentials or levels of mechanization. The workers in 1842 were attempting to monopolize the control of labor power throughout the labor market. In this sense, the strike of 1842 reflected the universalization of labor as a commodity and the workers' recognition of this through their attempt to monopolize its control in the market. The workers' recognition of the uselessness of focusing on specific employers and the way it

fit into an overall realization of the nature of capitalism was put forth in a Northern Star editorial:

Our opinion is that strikes have always been injurious to the workmen, and they always will be so, until the people have one of two things--the power of legislation, or a confirmed UNIVERSALITY of action and organization.<sup>57</sup>

A second basic difference between these strikes was the purposes for which workers employed force. In 1811-12 and 1826, the workers destroyed new machinery in an attempt to halt its further introduction. In 1842, the most they did in relation to machinery was to pull out boiler plugs so as to enforce the solidarity of the strike. Once again, the difference focuses on the 1842 turn-outs' goal of enforcing a class solidarity in comparison with earlier attempts to thwart or pursue specific developments and grievances. Moreover, the fact that the two earlier actions were by outworkers and weavers should lend considerable weight to our contention that factory proletarians were the critical group in 1842. Behind the shifting modalities of action was the structural shift to industrial capitalism and the consequent change in the social base of worker contention. Taken in conjunction with the attempts to universalize the strike, the absence of machine destruction in 1842 indicates the involvement of workers who were very much a part of industrial capitalist society.

One final comparison is also worth noting. The "economic" actions of 1811-12 and 1826 often imperceptibly blended into food riots. In 1842, on the other hand, there were only three or four instances of attacks on food retailers; and none of these

involved the characteristic action of fixing a "just price".

This is important because it indicates the movement away from conflicts between consumers and producers in the commodity market to conflicts between labor and capital in the labor market. A transformation in the arenas of conflict that Max Weber identified as following from the development of industrial capitalism.<sup>58</sup>

This shift was one of the major structural reasons for the relative failure of the Anti-Corn Law League to gain significant worker support. Essentially, they were attempting to form a middle class-working class coalition on the basis of their mutual interests as consumers vis-a-vis food producers. James Leach summed up the historical blindness of this position at a November 11 meeting when he said that "cheaper food isn't the issue but rather better wages are the real question".<sup>59</sup> In the labor market, the Anti-Corn Law League did not have much of a chance in 1842. All of this indicates that Lord Abinger, who presided at the Liverpool trial of some turn-outs and Chartists, was pretty accurate when he said

They might feel some compassion for workmen, who on the invention of new machinery, endeavored to take vengeance on what they supposed to be the cause of the loss of labour...but that workmen should conspire together, march through the country, and suspend all labour, was a thing altogether new....<sup>60</sup>

What was new was the emergence of the industrial proletariat as the backbone of working class contention for political democracy. E.P. Thompson is right in arguing that Chartism was the expression of a working class "...no longer in the making but already made."<sup>61</sup>

## FOOTNOTES

1. N. Smelser, Social Change and the Industrial Revolution (1959); F. Engels, The Condition of the Working-Class in England (1844). A brief summary of the historical disputes surrounding Chartism is F.C. Mather, Chartism (Historical Association Pamphlet no. 61, 1972).
2. Smelser, op. cit., pp 194-201, quote on p 199.
3. Ibid., p 242.
4. Ibid., p 387.
5. Engels, op. cit., pp 276-77.
6. Vol. 1, p 390 (Vintage, 1976).
7. Two brief articles summarize and review these theories. The first favorable one is Ted Gurr, "The Revolution-Social Change Nexus: Some Old Theories and New Hypotheses". The second, critical one is Charles Tilly, "Does Modernization Breed Revolution?" Both are in Comparative Politics V. 5 (1973), pp 359-92 and 425-48.
8. Smelser, op. cit., p 394.
9. Ibid., p 388.
10. The Making of Victorian England (1962), p 135.
11. Class Struggle and the Industrial Revolution (1974). A recent work which is critical of Foster and is more systematic in its treatment of the actual patterns of working-class contention is David Gadian, "Class Consciousness in Oldham and other North-west Industrial Towns, 1830-1850", Historical Journal, 21 (1978) pp 161-72. Gadian, however, does not pay attention to variations between towns in terms of their levels of worker contention or put enough emphasis on the political processes of mobilization and demobilization.
12. From Mobilization to Revolution (1978), p 276.
13. All data on Urbanism, Urbanization, and Urban Growth are from J.T. Danson and T.A. Welton, "On the Population of Lancashire and Cheshire, and its local distribution during the Fifty-Years, 1801-1851", Transactions Historic Society of Lancashire and Cheshire, vols 9-12 (1856-57--1859-60). The information on textile factory workers, 1838 is from Sessional Papers (HC), 1839, XLII (Returns from Factory Inspectors). All calculations are my own.

14. Data on the rate of change in textile factory workers 1835-38 is from H.B. Rodgers; "The Lancashire Cotton Industry in 1840", Transactions and Papers, Institute of British Geographers, 28 (1960), pp 135-53.

15. All correlations reported in the text were done without the parishes of Chipping and Radcliffe which were extreme deviants. Their small populations (1675 and 5099 respectively) meant that when their raw figures were converted into rates per 100,000 they were extremely high. Chipping had three collective activity events and one non-Chartist contention. Radcliffe had seven collective activity events and one Chartist contention. When converted into rates per 100,000 Chipping's collective activity was 176.5 and its non-Chartist contention was 58.8. Radcliffe's figures were 137.3 and Chartist contention was 19.6. All of these figures were the highest ones achieved, and the ones for collective activity and non-Chartist contention were extremely high. The average rates for the other 24 parishes were: collective activity = 30.4; non-Chartist contention = 6.8; and Chartist contention = 5.5. The way Chipping and Radcliffe distorted the correlations we will discuss in the next few pages can be seen in the matrix immediately below (the figures in parentheses are the coefficients which were obtained when Chipping and Radcliffe were excluded):

	<u>Chartist Contention</u>	<u>Non-Chartist Contention</u>	<u>Collective Activity</u>
Urbanization	-.10(-.07)	-.05(+.16)	-.004(+.17)
Urban Growth		NO CHANGE	
Urbanism	-.01(+.07)	+.03(+.38)	-.09(+.28)
Industrialization		NO CHANGE	
Industrialism	+.35(+.52)	+.30(+.52)	+.26(+.64)
Textile Workers Per 1,000 acres	+.45(+.60)	+.31(+.80)	+.29(+.79)
Collective Activity	+.35(+.50)	+.70(+.68)	
Non-Chartist Contention	+.05(+.64)		

In light of their small number of events and their large impact on the overall pattern of relationships, their exclusion seemed warranted. The twenty-four remaining parishes are: Ashton, Blackburn, Bolton, Bury, Chorley, Dalton, Dean, Eccles, Lancaster, Leigh, Liverpool, Manchester, Middleton, Prescott, Preston, Prestwich-cum-Oldham, Rochdale, Sefton, Stockport, Ulverstone, Warrington, Whalley, Wigan, and Ormskirk.

16. Data on the rate of change in textile factory workers 1835-38 ("Industrialization") is available for twelve parishes in Rodgers, op. cit.: They are: Ashton, Blackburn, Bolton, Bury, Lancaster, Leigh, Prestwich-cum-Oldham, Preston, Rochdale, Stockport, Whalley, and Wigan.

17. Source is the same as in n. 13, above.

18. For fluctuations during 1842, see Figure 1, p 35. A quick sampling of 1840 indicates levels of Chartist contention about two to three times lower than in 1842.

19. "Literacy and Social Mobility in the Industrial Revolution in England", Past and Present, 56 (1974), pp 75-104.

20. Ibid., pp 89-95.

21. I have not undertaken a complete partial correlational-causal analysis for two reasons: (1) the small number of cases; and (2) the inability to rule out reciprocal causation. In fact, reciprocal causation was, as our discussion will indicate, a paramount reality in regard to Chartist and non-Chartist contention.

22. A Study in Trade-Cycle History (1954), esp. pp 127-51.

23. Ibid., p 142.

24. Ibid., p 144.

25. Sessional Papers (HC), 1842, XXII (Returns from Factory Inspectors).

26. On the relation between the transparency of class divisions and class conflict, see Anthony Giddens, The Class Structure of the Advanced Societies (1975), pp 99-117. Wilhelm Reich provides an intriguing discussion of the way everyday contingencies may result in class consciousness in his "What is Class Consciousness?" (1934). Vladimir Akimov also has much of interest to say, see Jonathan Frankel (ed.) Vladimir Akimov on the Dilemmas of Russian Marxism 1895-1903 (1969).

27. Notes of a Tour of the Manufactory Districts (1842), p 84.

28. Ibid., p 90.

29. Ibid., p 238.

30. Ibid., p 283.

31. Ibid., p 107.

32. Ibid., pp 155-56.

33. On contagion models of conflict see Kenneth Boulding, Conflict and Defense (1962), pp 123-42.

34. The high unemployment parishes were Blackburn, Manchester, Preston, Rochdale, Whalley, and Wigan. The low were Ashton, Bolton, Bury, and Oldham. Unemployment was defined as Number of textile factory workers, 1841 not working  $\frac{1}{4}$  Number working, 1841. Source: Sessional Papers (HC) 1842, XXII.
35. Northern Star (NS), 5/28/42.
36. Details on the Anti-Corn Law League may be found in Norman McCord, The Anti-Corn Law League (1958).
37. NS, 6/25/42.
38. NS, 3/26/42.
39. Reprinted in D. Thompson, The Early Chartist (1962), p 293.
40. I am presenting a very brief introduction to the events of the strike. Those who feel the justifiable need for more extensive narration should consult A. Rose, "Plug Riots", Transactions Lancashire and Cheshire Antiquarian Society (1957).
41. NS, 8/20/42 and 9/17/42.
42. NS, 8/13/42.
43. NS, 5/14/42.
44. NS, 5/28/42; 6/4/42; 6/15/42; 7/16/42. For more detail on this process of trade union recruitment, see F.C. Mather, "The General Strike of 1842", Exeter Papers in Economic History, 6 (1972), pp 5-28.
45. NS, 5/21/42.
46. NS, 7/16/42.
47. The Mass Strike (Harper ed., 1971) p 48. For an analysis of the close relation between political conflicts and strike waves in France, see Edward Shorter and Charles Tilly, Strikes in France 1830-1968 (1974) pp 104-146.
48. NS, 8/13/42.
49. HO, 41/17 (8/15/42).
50. Descriptions of the repressive apparatus and its operation may be found in E.C. Midwinter "Law and Order in Early Victorian Lancashire", Bothwick Papers, no. 34 (1968) and F.C. Mather, Public Order in the Age of the Chartists (1966).
51. "The Machine Breakers" in Labouring Men (1964) pp 7-10.
52. NS, 8/27/42.
53. NS, 9/3/42.
54. NS, 9/24/42.
55. NS, 10/29/42.
56. Information on Luddism is from F.O. Darvall, Popular Disturbances and Public Order in Regency England (1934); M.I. Thomas, The Luddites (1970); and George Rude, The Crowd in History, 1730-1848 (1964), pp 66-92. The handloom-weavers' strike of 1826 is discussed in Duncan Bythell, The Handloom Weavers (1969), pp 197-204.
57. NS, 9/24/42.
58. "Class, Status and Party", in W.G. Runciman, ed., Weber, pp 47-48. The point here is that structural phenomena have great importance for the forms of action but less for its levels.
59. NS, 11/12/42.
60. NS, 10/22/42.
61. The Making of the English Working Class (1963), p 729.

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