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‘Packed tightly with the strong meat of history and political economy’: Mark Hovell
and Histories of Chartism

Malcolm Chase

Chartism dominated domestic politics during the first decade of Victoria’s reign. Effectively British civil rights movement, its history encompassed both moments of great drama and an unprecedented record of quieter political endeavour, drawing tens of thousands of men and women into a rich associational culture. The People’s Charter, published in 1838, made a case for parliamentary reform centred on universal male suffrage. The three peaks in the movement’s history (1839, 1842 and 1848) occurred around the collection, presentation and reception of three mass parliamentary petitions. Three and a third million people signed the second of these petitions, calling for the implementation of the Charter and range of other measures, including freedom of political expression and assembly, a reduction in the hours of factory labour, disestablishment of the Church of England, the repeal of the Irish Union, and against starvation wages, the national debt, the New Poor Law, a standing army, the 1839 Constabularies Act, the civil list and class bias in the administration of justice. The 1842 petition also enumerated a range of other grievances, including ‘monopolies of the suffrage, of paper money, of machinery, of land, of the public press, of religious privileges, of the means of travelling and transit, and a host of other evils too numerous to mention, all arising from class legislation’. This gives something of the flavour of Chartism, a mass movement the character and objectives of which continues to attract considerable historiographical energy.¹

Three questions have tended to dominate historical treatments of Chartism: to what extent was it consciously a movement of the industrial working class? Why did

it fail? And what was the role of the movement's leadership in that failure? These were the questions which preoccupied Mark Hovell in *The Chartist Movement* (1918), the first scholarly history of Chartism to be published in English. Until the 1980s, much of the historiography of Chartism was shaped by the dynamic binary of physical versus moral force, i.e. the deployment of civil disobedience and, even, outright insurgency versus patient agitation and gradualism. This binary was personified in two leading Chartist figures: William Lovett, the cabinet maker and secretary of London Working Men's Association (LWMA), who wrote the People's Charter that gave Chartism its name; and Feargus O'Connor, barrister and charismatic platform orator, born of a landed Irish family. To O'Connor (to quote *The Chartist Movement*) 'the intellectual and moral purposes of Lovett were foreign and unintelligible'.²

The 'Lovett versus O'Connor' dichotomy is rooted not only in a particular reading of the empirical data available concerning Chartism, but also in the ideological context in which most twentieth-century historians of the movement worked, especially Hovell.³ His book was published by Manchester University Press in January 1918 to considerable acclaim. A second edition appeared in 1925, which the Workers' Educational Association (WEA) was permitted to issue in paperback for 2s 6d (12.5p) 'to help working-class students'.⁴ The book was reprinted in 1943, 1950, 1959 and 1963. Manchester University Press then issued a third edition, with a short bibliographical introduction by W. H. Chaloner, in 1966. This was again reprinted in 1970. A specialist 'revival' publisher then re-issued it in 1994.⁵ Mark Hovell had written a book of remarkable longevity. It would be 'arrogant', J. T. Ward remarked in the introduction to his 1973 book *Chartism*, to claim to supplant it; indeed Ward offered a re-assessment only insofar as he took into account the many studies that had appeared subsequently, adding nothing by way of new engagement

with archival material. A decade later Gareth Stedman Jones observed that Hovell was 'still perhaps the most influential historian of Chartism'.⁶ It was only around this time that Hovell's influence appreciably diminished. This was partly because Stedman Jones offered an innovative critique of the proposition that Chartism was uncomplicatedly (or even particularly) a class-based movement; and partly it was because in 1982 and 1984 two books, by James Epstein and Dorothy Thompson respectively, appeared that re-set the historiography, dismissing Lovett as close to irrelevant, placing O'Connor unequivocally at Chartism's head, and stressing the movement's slogan of 'peaceably if we may, forcibly if we must' rather than any false polarity between moral and physical force.⁷ Even so, in the words of one of the most influential of contemporary scholars of the movement, Hovell remains 'the doyen of Chartist historians'.⁸

Mark Hovell, in the words of the Birmingham Daily Post 'was one of a class, ever growing in the present generation, who fight their way up the educational ladder in spite of financial and other disadvantages, and prove themselves able interpreters of the history and aspirations of their own class'. Several reviews of his book commented on this author's 'none-too-prosperous working-class background'.⁹ He was one of the seven children of a Dublin-born pawnbroker (based initially in Ancoats and then Harpurhey, three miles north-east of Manchester's city centre).¹⁰ Mark Hovell's pathway to University was not a smooth one: although he won a scholarship to Manchester Grammar School, he left at the age of twelve due to his family's precarious economic circumstances. He became a pupil teacher at thirteen. His talent was spotted at Manchester's Pupil Teacher College, where he won the scholarship that took him to Manchester University.

Hovell's close acquaintance with Chartism had its origins in 1910, in the WEA classes he taught in the cotton towns of Ashton-under-Lyne, Colne, Leigh and Middleton. These, Ashton in particular, were heartlands of Chartism where the memory of the movement was still very much alive. Even after the war began, Hovell was still giving lectures in northern industrial towns, for example on 'The Growth of Democracy in England' to Bamford Working Mens' Club, Rochdale, and to the Huddersfield Adult School Union on 'Germany and the German People' and 'Russia as an International Peacemaker'.¹¹ After his death, the secretary of one of his WEA classes wrote to the Highway, the Association's journal, that Hovell was 'a man with a large heart, one who sympathised with the sorrows and sufferings of the people. His great desire was to serve his fellows by educating, and so exalting the manhood of the nation'.¹²

Although Hovell had studied and taught for a year (1912-13) under the tutelage of Karl Lamprecht at Leipzig's Institute for Cultural and Universal History, his approach to Chartism was rooted in a close reading of contemporary sources, especially the papers of the auto-archivist William Lovett and the voluminous papers of his mentor Francis Place. As a historian Hovell engaged little with the 'rank and file' or 'grassroots' of the movement. There is no evidence that he even noticed, still-less was influenced by, any elements of a surviving oral tradition about Chartism. Yet he must have encountered some hint of this through the WEA. At least one of his classes, at Leigh (near Wigan) in 1915, was devoted to Chartism.¹³ One Lancashire Chartist, William Chadwick (originally from Ancoats and imprisoned for sedition and conspiracy in 1848), had lectured for the Liberal Party in the 1890s and even campaigned in the 1906 General Election. 'Th' Owld Chartist' (as he was popularly known) was buried in Stockport in 1908.¹⁴ And in the same year that Hovell's book,

appeared a Leeds academic published a dialect poem, 'The Hungry Forties', in a volume dedicated to Yorkshire members of the WEA: it clearly drew on direct accounts of the decade, including the 1842 strike wave or 'Plug Plot'.¹⁵

What mattered above all to Hovell were issues of leadership. The lectureship to which he was appointed at Manchester in 1914 was in military history and much of *The Chartist Movement* was written (some of it on War Office headed paper) when off-duty during officer training after he volunteered for the army in 1915: 'I am pegging away at the thesis', he wrote while at Lichfield Barracks in June 1915, 'I wrote for eight hours yesterday'.¹⁶ Leadership preoccupied him, both for its intrinsic importance in understanding why Chartism failed, but also because leadership style appeared to offer practical pointers to the conduct of contemporary politics. In Hovell's text the essential division in the leadership of Chartism is not between physical force and moral force (a division he presciently saw was superficial, throwing only limited light on what he termed 'the fundamental problem of the Chartist ideal'). The essential difference was a class one. On the one hand there were the 'leaders of higher social position', who taught Chartism 'little that conduced to moderation, business method, or practical wisdom'; and on the other hand there was 'a better type of Chartist leader', personified in Lovett but also in Thomas Cooper, an autodidact shoemaker, poet and a Chartist leader in the Midlands. This 'better type' was distinguished by 'steady honesty of purpose, their power of learning through experience to govern themselves and others, their burning hatred of injustice and their passion for the righting of wrongs'. Feargus O'Connor personified the leader of higher social position. But not coincidentally, he also personified the first category of the 'clearest way of dividing the Chartists'. This was into 'a reactionary and a progressive section', a divide between those who viewed society as 'so hopelessly bad

as to be incapable of improvement' and therefore 'to be ended as soon as practicable' (306), and 'the school of Lovett and Cooper [which] accepted the Industrial Revolution and tried to make the best of it' (309-310).

There is a paradox here: none of the words quoted in the preceding paragraph are Hovell's. Tragically, Second Lieutenant Mark Hovell had died on 12 August 1916 attempting to rescue a member of his platoon, overcome by fumes, from a shaft in which a mine had just been detonated beneath a German trench.¹⁷ The book's concluding chapter, 'The Decline of Chartism (1842-53)' was the work of the medievalist Thomas Frederick Tout, head of History at Manchester. This was explained by Tout in prefatory note that few probably bothered to read, and which was deleted altogether from the third edition of 1966.¹⁸

How Hovell would have completed his history is a matter for speculation. However, in a real sense this hardly matters. Successive generations of readers have approached the book as an organic whole and as such it has exercised an enduring influence on the historiography of Chartism. According to Stedman Jones, Hovell 'set the terms of the predominant approach when he argued that "by 1838 the Radical Programme was recognised no longer as an end in itself, but as a means to an end, and the end was the social and economic regeneration of society"'.¹⁹ Stedman Jones was quoting Hovell himself here; but further quotations to clinch the argument that his thinking 'betrayed a basic misunderstanding', were entirely taken from Tout's concluding assessment of 'The Place of Chartism in History'.¹⁹

What, therefore, was Mark Hovell's achievement and what was added to his text that may have distorted the history that bore his name? It is an obvious point, but one still needing emphasis, that before his work there was no book-length history of the Chartist movement in English. French and German monographs had appeared in

1913, by Edouard Dolléans and Max Beer, respectively.²⁰ It is unclear if Hovell ever managed to read Dolléans, but he read Beer thoroughly. Before he did so, Hovell's stance was sceptical: 'Beer's work seems to be a Marxian production', he told Tout, 'and probably one-sided on that account'.²¹ Beer was very far from doctrinaire, however, and his attentiveness to the intellectual formation of radical thought was a trait that Hovell very much shared. In *The Chartist Movement* he spoke warmly of Beer's 'excellent' (32) and 'careful research' (91). Hovell was, however, never able to access three American studies of specialist aspects of Chartism, published in 1916.²²

The Chartist Movement was therefore without precedent in English. It was also meticulously researched and its findings thoughtfully contextualised. Hovell saw Chartism as clearly situated in radical political responses to the industrial revolution. He was careful both to delineate the main features of the latter (whose 'critical years' he argued were 1815-40) and to outline the evolution of 'anti-capitalist economics and social revolutionary theory' in Britain from the 1770s to the inception of Chartism. He commenced with a fresh and analytical account of the intellectual, economic and social origins of Chartism. There then followed a chronological treatment of the movement up to the second National Petition presented in May 1842. In all his original manuscript supplied sixteen chapters and 258 printed pages.²³ It is inconceivable that Hovell would have completed his history in a mere fifty-three printed pages as Tout did. Nor would he necessarily have presented all of the movement's history from the summer of 1842 as a narrative of decline. Judging by the extent of his notes, written in a strikingly neat hand on hundreds of carefully indexed slips of paper, Hovell had intended to cover the movement's history at least to 1851.²⁴

In all probability Hovell's history, had he completed it, would have been around half as long again as the book that finally appeared. In a letter to Tout on 7 June 1915, Hovell wrote of being 'fully half way through the first draft' and he appears to have continued to work on it until he was transferred to Chelsea Barracks in the autumn for adjutancy training (or as he ruefully described it, 'to be prussianised').²⁵ At that point his narrative stopped just short of the July-August 1842 strike wave. It is true that the fortunes of the Chartist movement slumped in the mid-1840s and would not have merited the close reading that Hovell brought to its earliest years. However, the revival of 1847-8 was significant and a syllabus for a WEA lecture course on Chartism, 1838-48, shows that Hovell devoted just over a third of it to its history after May 1842.

To judge by his notes, Hovell's extended treatment of later Chartism (had he lived to write it) would have rounded-out his portrait of O'Connor, but without ameliorating the verdict reached in writing the history up to mid-1842. Hovell, for example, thought that O'Connor offered the Chartists 'exceedingly sound advice' when he urged them to become involved in local and municipal politics.²⁶ He had also accumulated considerable material on the Chartist Land Plan. While unequivocal about 'its fraudulent character', his research notes gave particular attention to Heinrich Niehuus's 1910 history of English land reform, underlining the German's conclusion that 'the Success of the scheme was considerable'.²⁷ Hovell clearly located the scheme within a broader radical agrarian tradition, extending from Thomas Spence (present in the book, but only in its background survey of anti-capitalist economics) up to the Edwardian agitation for land reform. He made notes on a 1907 book by Louisa Jebb, a leader member of the Co-operative Smallholdings Society, a study with a photograph of a Charterville cottage as its frontispiece and which

concluded that the Plan offered ‘wholesome object-lessons’ in the promotion of smallholdings.²⁸ Hovell’s notes and responses to Niehuus and Jebb were available to Tout who, however, chose not to use them.²⁹ It is therefore likely that Hovell would have offered a more-balanced assessment than Tout’s depiction of O’Connor’s efforts to ‘flog the twin steeds of the Charter and the Land’ (274), an endeavour complicated by his ‘extraordinary indifference and ignorance in all matters of business’ whilst giving ‘himself the airs of a prince’ (278).

Hovell clearly believed, though, that after 1842 ‘Chartism becomes O’Connorism’.³⁰ ‘O’Connorism’ was also the title of one of his chapters (220-29). We shall see shortly that this interpretation was very much in tune with the prevailing political climate within which he wrote; but his well-documented history gave it the appearance of an objective authority, hitherto absent from the historiography. As has already been noted, Hovell constructed much of his analysis of the strengths and failings of Chartist leaders through a highly polarised treatment of Lovett and O’Connor. Indeed, one of the index cards with which he organised his research notes was headed simply ‘O’CONNOR v LOVETT’.³¹ However, no less than any other historian, Mark Hovell was constrained by his sources: only two Chartist autobiographies were available to him, Thomas Cooper’s and William Lovett’s, neither of which were at all positive about O’Connor. And of necessity Hovell relied heavily on the Francis Place Manuscripts in the British Museum Library, along with the substantial scrapbooks of newspaper cuttings and ephemera that Place also collected. The immensity of Place’s collections has threatened to overwhelm many a historian. Immersed in its riches, it is easy to be unmindful that the selection of this material was inevitably shaped by biases of location and political temperament. Place was a Londoner with little direct acquaintance with the industrial north, had always

been disdainful of anything that smacked of demagoguery, and by the 1830s was a Benthamite liberal. None of these characteristics were exactly propitious for an informed understanding of O'Connor and his influence.

Yet, here again a close reading of Hovell's papers and notebooks suggests that his vision of Chartism's history was significantly more-nuanced than the book that bears his name suggests. Tout intervened in the chapters Hovell had completed mostly to make minor stylistic changes, or move sentences or paragraphs to locations where they better supported the development of the overall narrative and analysis. However, he deleted Hovell's unfavourable comparison of the 1839 Petition to that of 1848 (the latter 'mostly "fake" signatures', Tout opined).³² He also toned-down Hovell's sympathetic interpretation of O'Brien's intervention in the 1839 Convention debate on the 'Sacred Month' (the use of general strike as an ulterior measure to secure the Charter). Hovell had commented that O'Brien 'was the oracle mouth piece of Chartism. The Chartist schoolmaster. Now he was abandoning his allies and counselling moderation and prudence'; but Tout deleted this, although he retained an observation that O'Brien's intervention 'required no little courage on his part'.³³ Tout also removed Hovell's emphasis on the debt owed by the LWMA to the model of the London Corresponding Society; and he deleted a comment in the original manuscript that related the Association's genesis to 'the dread years which followed Peterloo'.³⁴ The effect of such deletions may seem minimal, but they served to dilute Hovell's clear perception that the LWMA was rooted in a longer tradition of political agitation. Also, by detaching the Association's prehistory from Peterloo, a message is silently reinforced that Lovett and the LWMA constituted an altogether more-measured response to early industrialism than 'the desperate days of Hampden clubs, Spencean

propaganda and Peterloo massacre’, a remark Hovell made in relation to the anti-Poor Law agitation in Lancashire and Yorkshire (91).

A scrupulous scholar, had Hovell lived both to complete his manuscript and revise it before publication he would surely have produced a very different book – incorporating insights from Dolléans and the American studies of 1916, and acting perhaps on the messages he left for himself in his research notes. In his ‘Trade Unionism’ notebook, for example, he outlined some key points about the London shipwright John Gast. He then scribbled on a blank verso, ‘John Gast / worth working out / Deptford’. Over sixty years later another Manchester historian did indeed ‘work out’ John Gast. The result was a major contribution to the history of London radicalism in the age of the Chartists that critically re-evaluated the influence of Francis Place, to whom The Chartist Movement was so much in thrall.³⁵

It is tempting to continue in this vein of counter-factual hypothesising about the kind of historian Mark Hovell might have become. However, the remainder of this article will assess his book as actually published in 1918. As a text, *The Chartist Movement. By the Late Mark Hovell, M. A. 2nd Lieutenant, The Sherwood Foresters, and Lecturer in Military History in the University. Edited and Completed, with a Memoir, by Professor T. F. Tout* (to quote its title in full) derived considerable emotional force from the circumstances of its author’s death. This was boosted by the inclusion of his photograph, in uniform, as the frontispiece of the book (its only illustration in fact, retained until the third edition of 1966). An explicit claim of moral authority was to be found in Tout’s heart-felt introductory memoir. He observed that ‘the problems of fourteenth-century administration ... under ordinary circumstances would have had a first claim upon my time’; but ‘a veteran can hardly have a more acceptable war task than doing what in him lies to fill up a void in scholarship which

the sacrifice of battle has occasioned.’ Tout quoted verbatim a chaplain’s account of how Hovell had asked to receive Holy Communion before going into the trenches for the last time. ‘He has’, the chaplain concluded, ‘as the soldiers say, “gone West” in a blaze of glory. He has fought and died in the noblest of all causes’. Tout himself added that the author of *The Chartist Movement* had ‘made the supreme sacrifice, and the cannon still roar round the British burial ground ... where he lies at rest ... the enemy’s guns still rain shell round his unquiet tomb’.³⁶

This added moral authority, un-anticipated by Hovell when he put aside his manuscript, was emphasised by contemporary reviewers. All mentioned the circumstances of his death; several referred to him by his military rank throughout.³⁷ The book in and of itself assumed a physical status as ‘a fitting memorial’, ‘a striking memorial’ and ‘a worthy monument to a true patriot’.³⁸ ‘One feels throughout’, commented the *English Historical Review*, that a ‘true historian has been lost to England’.³⁹ *The Nation* saw *The Chartist Movement* as a patriotic achievement and equated it directly with the act of heroism that had led to its author’s death, whilst the *Athenaeum* declared ‘the book itself is a type of the tragedy of the War with its waste of youth’.⁴⁰ *Common Cause* (the newspaper of the National Union of Women’s Suffrage Societies) ventured the view that ‘the history of Lieut. Hovell’s short and valiant life – valiant both in peace and war’ might be the most attractive part of the book to some readers.⁴¹

No less significantly, many reviewers saw the book as a contribution to post-war political discourse and reconstruction as much as to historical scholarship, ‘full of lessons to be learnt by the Chartist failure’. The *Contemporary Review* predicted Hovell would henceforth ‘be known to fame as the historian of a great industrial movement and an indicator of the sound lines of social progress’. The *Saturday*

Review praised the book for being ‘packed tightly with the strong meat of history and political economy’, adding that ‘there can be no better preparation for the understanding of the terrible events which enfold the nation than tracing through the chapters of this careful work the stream of Socialism to its source in Chartism’.⁴² In the Manchester Guardian, the Fabian R. C. K. Ensor (subsequently author of one of the most successful volumes in the Oxford History of England) emphasised the value of Hovell’s ‘fidelity to truth’ in delineating the issue of leadership. Few histories could assist the modern labour movement more than that of Chartism, argued Ensor, ‘in showing it what to avoid’. Those of its leaders who were honourable men, like Lovett, were ‘of insufficient calibre; those who had the capacity for leadership on a large scale were either unmitigated charlatans like Feargus O’Connor or doctrinaire revolutionaries like Bronterre O’Brien’.⁴³

It is Lovett’s modernizing tendencies that most commended him to his twentieth-century posterity, a perspective heavily influenced by the Fabian Society (a formative influence on the British Labour Party that emphasised calm reflection and rational planning over direct confrontation as the ideal approach to political action). And Hovell’s treatment of Lovett (‘his hero’, commented the Athenaeum) was almost universally acclaimed. There were only a handful of exceptions. The Times Literary Supplement’s reviewer took issue with Hovell for being ‘too hard upon Feargus O’Connor’, while the Nation observed – though only in passing – that he had ‘made too much of the violence and folly of O’Connor and certain other leaders, to whom it is impossible to give the whole of the blame for the defeat of the movement’.⁴⁴ The Statesman was more stringent, believing that Hovell’s sympathies with the Chartists rested on their being economic victims rather than ‘merely political aspirations’. The reviewer argued that Hovell,

felt that the Chartist Movement was to a very great extent misbegotten and misdirected, proceeding towards undesirable ends by unsuitable means under inefficient leaders ... a historian of real breadth of view would have shown more sympathy ... he dislikes most of all the man who came nearest to attaining an effective hegemony over the movement ... Hovell's academic disapproval is unfair.⁴⁵

Only one other journal, the Socialist Review criticised the book (perhaps predictably given that it was published by the Independent Labour Party) taking issue both with Hovell's 'academic exactitude' and his 'barren judgment' that Chartism's 'tendency to hark back to the Bible and to Christianity as a basis of political and social practice' was one of its most interesting features.⁴⁶ All other reviews (and there are over thirty of them) eulogised the book. The young Raymond Postgate, until recently a Conscientious Objector, uniquely criticised Tout's concluding chapter, dismissing it as 'superficial in the extreme'. Yet in his review, which appeared in the Scottish [Marxist] Socialist Labour Party's journal, Postgate was adamant that Hovell's own work was 'above criticism'.⁴⁷

For several reviewers the book's depiction of 'the evil spirit of an excellent movement', as one newspaper summarised it, was a conspicuous virtue.⁴⁸ Hovell's book was critical in reconstituting Lovett for a twentieth-century readership as a Fabian *avant la lettre*. The credit for this – if credit it be – was not his alone. A range of earlier authors had anticipated this line of argument, but had done so largely polemically and within the context of contemporary political debate. Thus George Bernard Shaw, in the famous 1889 Fabian Essays in Socialism, surveyed the

marxist Social Democratic Federation and its leader H. J. Hyndman and commented that it was ‘as if Chartism and Fergus O’Connor had risen from the dead’.⁴⁹ In 1900 the Independent Labour Party activist Ramsden Balmforth presented a compelling pen-portrait of O’Connor (whom Balmforth’s father had known). ‘Possessing lungs of brass and a voice like a trumpet, he was the most effective outdoor orator of his time ... Unfortunately, both for the movement and for himself, he was a man of unbounded conceit and egotism’. Characterizing O’Connor as the leading figure in ‘a “physical force” party ... sprung up in the movement in opposition to the “moral force” party led by Lovett’, Balmforth judged O’Connor the Chartist leader ‘most culpable’ for the movement’s failure.⁵⁰ Missing from such polemical treatments and from Hovell’s history alike was any sense of the Lovett who wrote the Manifesto of the 1839 Chartist Convention with its unambiguous statement of ulterior measures (including the right to bear and use arms) and with his portrait prominent on the title page; or of the Lovett who wrote this explicit assertion that Whig government policy was a breach of the contract that required from the governed the duty of obedience:

When the liberties of a million people are prostrated to the dust at the will of a grasping, despicable minority – when an attempt is made to destroy their representative rights, the only existing bond of allegiance, the only power through which laws can be justly enforced, is broken. Then has the time arrived when society is dissolved into its original elements.⁵¹

However, from these observations about late-Victorian treatments of Chartism the only earlier book-length History of the Chartist Movement, written by R. G.

Gammage (himself a Chartist) is exempt. Much though he detested him, Gammage presented O'Connor as the near-constant presence around which the movement evolved and declined. In the quite extensive revisions made to the 1854 edition for its republication in 1894, no attempt was made to redress the balance in Lovett's favour. Indeed, in the concluding chapter a parallel was actually added comparing O'Connor's slump in popularity in 1852 with Christ on the eve of crucifixion. In the 438 pages of the 1894 edition of Gammage's *History*, there are but ten references to Lovett (and only eight to the LWMA) compared to well-over sixty to O'Connor.⁵²

Spotlighting Lovett in Whiggish historiographical light continued after Hovell with the publication in 1920 of *A History of the Chartist Movement* by Julius West.⁵³ This too was a posthumous publication, though West had died rather more prosaically in the influenza pandemic of 1918-19, his health already imperilled by the privations he had experienced while a newspaper correspondent in Russia in 1914-15 and 1917-18. Tout had warmly acknowledged West's 'important service' in helping prepare Hovell's work for the press. West read both 'the whole manuscript' and the proofs, 'correcting errors, resolving doubts, and ... advising as to the form the publication was to take'.⁵⁴ Given this, plus the broader political context within which both men had pursued their research, it is hardly surprising that both books had, as West told Tout, 'some points of complete agreement'.⁵⁵ Hovell, though, had the advantage over West of being published by a university press; West, on the other hand, was published by a commercial house (Constable) with a weak list in modern history. West's book was never reprinted (until a 1968 facsimile) and is far less well-known as a result. However, it has the distinct merit of having been conceptualised and completed by its author as a history extending to what West termed Chartism's 'passing' in the 1850s. Despite this the narrative is still largely in thrall to a Lovettite teleology. West praised

Lovett's National Association (the organisation he founded after his release from prison in 1840) for its educational objectives: its proposal for circulating libraries, thought West, was 'reduced to practical dimensions' by the book box scheme of the Fabian Society. West had worked at the Fabians' head office before the War and in his conclusion explicitly compared the LWMA with the Fabian Society. 'In many respects', he commented, 'there is, in fact, an analogy between the W. M. A. and the Fabian Society. Both produced ideas, and left the task of forcing them upon the attention of an apathetic country to larger bodies'. Although he praised Ernest Jones for the tenacity with which he dedicated himself to Chartism after 1848, West saw him as little more than a pale imitation of O'Connor whose 'dictatorship' he sought to continue.⁵⁶

So by 1920 the interpretive framework of Chartism was largely set, with Hovell's academic approach acting to extend and reinforce prevailing earlier interpretations of the movement. Almost everywhere one looks in the inter-war period, Chartism was presented with Lovett versus O'Connor very much as the overarching explanatory device. The Fabian and Christian Socialist R. H. Tawney, introducing his 1920 edition of Lovett's autobiography, drew almost exclusively upon Hovell for his citations, varying the diet only in referencing the Fabian Graham Wallas's biography of Francis Place ('to whom Lovett owed much'). Tawney drew a sharp contrast between Lovett and O'Connor, portraying the latter as having 'snatched the Chartist movement after 1839 out of the hands of London, and carried it forward on a wave of misery and violence to its ignominious collapse'.⁵⁷ Sometimes the history of the movement was virtually reduced to a Lovett versus O'Connor narrative. Thus in *The Encyclopedia of the Labour Movement* (published in 1928 with an

introduction by Ramsay MacDonald and contributions from seventeen other ministers who had served in the first Labour Government) Lovett was

a thorough-going Social Democrat, basing his belief in Socialism on well-thought-out lines ... he would use neither appeal to physical force nor oratory to get his aims realised. In all this he was a complete contrast to Feargus O'Connor ... an orator of violent description ... He had no original ideas, but caught up whatever was in the wind ... he beat nobler partners out of the ranks ... Lovett's guidance was the nobler and has proved the more beneficial in the long run.⁵⁸

The future Labour Party leader Hugh Gaitskell, writing for the WEA, similarly stressed that it was 'difficult to find two persons more naturally antipathetic': Lovett 'serious, conscientious, almost painfully honest'; O'Connor 'rebellious and egotistical ... he cared neither for education nor morals, having neither in great measure himself'. Gaitskell argued that the failure to secure an enduring alliance with the middle class was among the Chartists' greatest failings, largely explainable by middle-class reaction against the working classes' 'evil habit of threatening violence and following rash leaders like O'Connor'.⁵⁹ John and Barbara Hammond, political liberals for whom reconciling working- and middle-class opinion was the fulcrum of history and contemporary politics alike, praised Lovett in their 1930 *The Age of the Chartists*. He 'managed to arrange a working alliance with the left-wing of the Anti-Corn Law League', but the Hammonds then went on to emphasise that that the fruit of this, the Complete Suffrage Union 'was destroyed by the sinister hand of Feargus O'Connor'.⁶⁰ In so doing they cheerfully ignored the fact that the fatal motion passed

at the Complete Suffrage conference in December 1842, condemning the Union for failing to accommodate the wishes of the Chartists, was proposed by Lovett and seconded by O'Connor.⁶¹ Bonamy Dobrée's survey of 1937 contrasted the 'notorious ... intellectually weak' O'Connor ('actually in a lunatic asylum for three years before his death') with Lovett, 'a man of steadfast principle'. The spirit of Lovettism, Dobrée suggested, should preside at every meeting of the WEA.⁶² Four years later G. D. H. Cole published his *Chartist Portraits*. These offered the most-nuanced interpretation yet of Chartism's leaders. Yet even for Cole, O'Connor 'stole the movement' from Lovett and the LWMA.⁶³

The only discordant note in the valorisation of Lovett was sounded by the Marxist Theodore Rothstein in his 1929 history *From Chartism to Labourism*. Its very first paragraph sharply dismissed Hovell's work as 'of doubtful value' due to its having 'been written an anti-revolutionary, opportunist, "Lovettian" point of view'. Mindful, perhaps of the circumstances of the book's production, as well as the depth of the research on which it was based, Rothstein reserved his harshest criticism for West's history, 'a piece of supercilious and ignorant humbug worthy of the school of which he was such a promising a disciple'.⁶⁴ Lovett, in Rothstein's view was 'not over shrewd; [and] capable yet unfit for practical political struggle, since he did not possess even a spark of revolutionary temperament.' O'Connor, on the other hand, along with Frost, Jones and O'Brien, was 'the supreme embodiment ... of the genuinely proletarian current in Chartism that 'gave the movement its historic character'.⁶⁵ However, Rothstein's work was barely noticed by reviewers and had very little impact before the 1950s.⁶⁶

Mark Hovell was therefore the commanding figure in the historiography of Chartism until the final twenty years of the twentieth century. His history was a

genuine breakthrough. It was the first scholarly history of its subject in English; the first history of any kind to be based on a deep engagement with archival as well as printed sources; and Hovell situated Chartism not just in the history of popular protest but also in the intellectual traditions of ‘anti-capitalist economics and social revolutionary theory’ (the title of his third chapter). However, as published, *The Chartist Movement* is a flawed book. I am not suggesting that without Tout’s intervention Hovell would have loaded O’Connor with praise. But Hovell had only written his contextual chapters and a narrative of the movement up to May 1842 when he was posted to France. Once published, these constituted 258 out of a total of 312 pages. The remaining forty-five were assembled by Tout from Hovell’s research notes, plus a thirteen page conclusion that was entirely Tout’s own. Even Lovett’s most effusive admirers struggle to connect him much to Chartism after December 1842. The truncation of Hovell’s narrative has the effect of accentuating the Lovett-O’Connor binary, whilst largely marginalising other leaders (George Julian Harney and Ernest Jones especially) who would have provided further examples with which to analyse the leadership issue. And by offering us only eleven pages on 1848 and six on the whole history of Chartism from 1849-58, ‘Hovell’ the text also had an enduring impact on the way the rhythm of Chartist activity has been perceived. It is clear that, had he not died so tragically and so young, Mark Hovell would have written a longer, more-thoughtful and even more important book. Paradoxically, however, without the moral authority that his tragic death conferred upon it, Hovell’s history of the Chartist movement might well have had a shorter shelf life.

¹ The National Petition of the Industrious Classes (Leeds, Hobson, 1842). The historiography increases yearly. The most recent book-length treatment is M. Chase, *Chartism: A New History* (Manchester, Manchester University Press, 2007).

² M. Hovell, *The Chartist Movement* (Manchester, Manchester University Press, 1918). Unless otherwise specified, all subsequent quotations are taken from this edition, the pagination of which was also repeated in subsequent editions. In the text page numbers are given in brackets.

³ This and some of the following paragraphs draw on material in ‘The Leading Question in Chartist Historiography’, in M. Chase, *The Chartists: Perspectives and Legacies* (London, Merlin, 2015), pp. 14-26.

⁴ M. Hovell, *The Chartist Movement* (London, Student Bookshops Ltd, 1925), rear cover.

⁵ M. Hovell, *The Chartist Movement* (Aldershot, Gregg Revivals, 1994).

⁶ G. Stedman Jones, *Languages of Class: Studies in English working Class history, 1832-1982* (Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 1983), p. 99.

⁷ James Epstein, *The Lion of Freedom: Feargus O’Connor and the Chartist Movement* (London, Croom Helm, 1982); Dorothy Thompson, *The Chartists: Popular Politics in the Industrial Revolution* (London, Temple Smith, 1984).

⁸ Paul Pickering, ‘“And your Petitioners &c”’: Chartist Petitioning in Popular Politics, 1838-48’, *English Historical Review* 116 (April 2001), p. 383.

⁹ *Birmingham Daily Post*, 9 August 1918; *Labour Leader*, 22 August 1918.

¹⁰ 1861 and 1871 Census (15 Wharf St, Ancoats); 1881 and 1891 Census (19 Collyhurst Street, Harpurhey); 1901 Census (49, Amos Street, Harpurhey, Manchester); 1911 Census (17 Mary Street, Harpurhey).

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- ¹¹ Rochdale Observer, 9 December 1914; Huddersfield Daily Examiner, 21 January 1915.
- ¹² Highway (December 1916), quoted in T. F. Tout, 'Introduction', in Hovell, *Chartist Movement*, p. 57.
- ¹³ Manchester, University of Manchester Archives and Record Centre, Papers of Mark Hovell [hereafter Hovell Papers] HOV/1/2/3, printed syllabus for the Leigh WEA branch, 20 January 1915.
- ¹⁴ 'William Chadwick', in J. Bellamy and J. Saville (eds), *Dictionary of Labour Biography: Volume VII* (London, Macmillan, 1984), pp. 53-5.
- ¹⁵ F. W. Moorman, *Songs of the Ridings* (London, Elkin Matthews, 1918), pp. 49-50.
- ¹⁶ Manchester, John Rylands Library, Tout Papers, TFT/1/545, Hovell (Lichfield Barracks, 11 June 1915) to Tout.
- ¹⁷ 'Killed. A Distinguished Scholar', *Manchester Evening News*, 18 August 1916.
- ¹⁸ Tout, 'Preface', *Chartist Movement*, p. vii.
- ¹⁹ Stedman Jones, *Languages of Class*, p. 99, quoting *Chartist Movement*, pp. 7, 303.
- ²⁰ E. Dolléans, *Le Chartisme*, 2 vols (Paris, 1912-13); Max Beer, *Geschichte des Sozialismus in England* (Stuttgart, Dietz, 1913), part 2, 'Die Periode des Chartismus. Von 1825 bis 1854', pp. 225-422.
- ²¹ Tout Papers, TFT/1/545, Hovell (Leipzig) to Tout, 11 June 1913. The letter continues: 'the publication of these books will of course make some difference in my attack upon the problem but till I have read them I can't tell what the difference will be'. Hovell also read J. L. Tildsley, *Die Entstehung und die ökonomischen Grundsätze der Chartistenbewegung* (Jena, Fischer, 1898) – see his notes in the Hovell Papers, ARC/HOVELL additional material 2012/023, Box 6. However, by implication he

regarded it as one of the ‘mere popularisations of Blue book information’ that, he told Tout, most German works were (letter to Tout, 11 June 1913).

²² H. U. Faulkener, *Chartism and the Churches* (New York, Columbia University Press, 1916); F. F. Rosenblatt, *The Chartist Movement in its Social and Economic Aspects* (New York, Columbia University Press, 1916); P. W. Slosson, *The Decline of the Chartist Movement* (New York, Columbia University Press, 1916). The reference to Rosenblatt in *Chartist Movement*, p. 190, was Tout’s addition: compare Hovell’s original manuscript, fol. 253 (Hovell Papers, HOV/1/2/1).

²³ The original manuscript is split between Hovell Papers HOV/1/2/1, and ARC HOVELL, Additional Material 2012/023, Box 6.

²⁴ There are eight bundles of these in the Hovell Papers, HOV/1/2/2.

²⁵ Tout Papers, TFT/1/545, Hovell to Tout, 7 June and 13 October 1915.

²⁶ Hovell Papers, HOV1/2/2, Bundle 3, notes on *Northern Star*, 14 May 1842.

²⁷ H. Niehuus, *Geschichte der englischen Bodenreformtheorien* (Leipzig, 1910), p. 97; Hovell Papers, HOV1/2/3, notebook on economics and social history, fo. 16.

²⁸ Hovell Papers, HOV1/2/2, Bundle 6; HOV1/2/3, notebook on economics and social history, fos 64-6. For Jebb see Chase, *The Chartists: Perspectives and Legacies*, pp. 78-9.

²⁹ A note inside Hovell’s notebook containing this material, in Tout’s hand, indicates he presented it to the Manchester University’s Christie Library in March 1925.

³⁰ This was the title of his fourth lecture on Chartism to the Leigh WEA (see the syllabus in Hovell Papers, HOV1/2/3).

³¹ Hovell Papers, HOV 1/2/2 Fiche bundle 7.

³² Chartist Movement, p. 135, compared with the original manuscript (Hovell Papers, HOV/1/2/1, fo. 170) where Tout's comment that the 1848 Petition was mostly fake appears in a marginal annotation. This opinion was mitigated in Tout's concluding chapter, but he still detailed (p. 292) the extent of pseudonymous signatures to reinforce his argument that April 10 1848 was a 'tragic fiasco'.

³³ Chartist Movement, p. 167, and the original manuscript (Hovell Papers, HOV/1/2/1, fo. 220).

³⁴ Chartist Movement, p. 49, compared with the original manuscript (Hovell Papers, HOV/1/2/1, fo. 66). Tout retained other references to Peterloo but none were in connection with the LWMA.

³⁵ Hovell Papers, ARC/HOVELL, Additional Material 2012/023, Box 5, 'Trade Unionism' notebook, fol. 6 verso. I. J. Prothero, *Artisans and Politics in Early Nineteenth Century London: John Gast and his Times* (Folkestone, Dawson, 1979).

³⁶ Tout, 'Preface' and 'Introduction', Chartist Movement, pp. vii, xxxvi.

³⁷ E.g. *American Historical Review*, 24: 1 (24 January 1918), *Common Cause*, 19 April 1918, and *Political Science Quarterly*, 1:34 (March 1919).

³⁸ *Contemporary Review*, April 1918; *Manchester City News*, 2 February 1918; *Glasgow Evening News*, 7 February 1918.

³⁹ *English Historical Review* 138 (April 1920), p. 313.

⁴⁰ *Nation*, 9 March 1918; *Athenaeum*, May 1918.

⁴¹ *Common Cause*, 19 April 1918.

⁴² *Liverpool Courier*, 12 February 1918; *Contemporary Review*, April 1918; *Saturday Review*, 9 February 1918. See also *Spectator*, 9 February 1918.

⁴³ *Manchester Guardian*, 25 February 1918.

⁴⁴ *Times Literary Supplement*, 31 January 1918; *Nation*, 9 March 1918.

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- ⁴⁵ *New Statesman*, 23 February 1918.
- ⁴⁶ *Socialist Review*, July and September 1919. See also *Chartist Movement*, p. 85.
- ⁴⁷ *Socialist*, 13 March 1919. Postgate was the son-in-law of the Labour leader George Lansbury and would soon be a founder member of the Communist Party of Great Britain'. See 'Raymond Postgate', in Bellamy and Saville (eds), *Dictionary of Labour Biography: Volume II* (London, Macmillan, 1974), pp. 304-11.
- ⁴⁸ *Liverpool Courier*, 12 February 1918. See also *Manchester Guardian*, 25 February 1918 and *Athenaeum*, (May 1918).
- ⁴⁹ 'The Transition to Social Democracy', in G. B. Shaw (ed.), *Fabian Essays in Socialism* (London, Scott, 1889), p. 229.
- ⁵⁰ R. Balmforth, *Some Social and Political Pioneers of the Nineteenth Century* (London, Sonnenschein, 1902), p. 189.
- ⁵¹ Chase, *Chartism*, pp. 71-2; London Working Men's Association, *Address to the People of Canada* (1838), quoted in W. Lovett, *The Life and Struggles of William Lovett, in His Pursuit of Bread, Knowledge, and Freedom* (London, Trübner, 1876), p. 108.
- ⁵² R. G. Gammage, *The History of the Chartist Movement, from Its Commencement Down to the Present Time* (London, Holyoake, 1854); R. G. Gammage, *The History of the Chartist Movement, 1837-1854* (Newcastle upon Tyne, Browne, 1894), p. 390.
- ⁵³ J. West, *A History of the Chartist Movement. With an Introductory Memoir by J. C. Squire* (London, Constable, 1920).
- ⁵⁴ Tout, preface to the second edition (1925) of *Chartist Movement*, p. ix; preface to the first edition, pp. v-vi.
- ⁵⁵ Tout, preface to the second edition of *Chartist Movement*, p. vi.
- ⁵⁶ West, *History*, pp. 151, 258-95 (quoting 288).

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- ⁵⁷ R. H. Tawney, 'Introduction', *The Life and Struggles of Lovett in his Pursuit of Bread, Knowledge and Freedom* (London, Bell, 1920), vol. 1, pp. vii, xv.
- ⁵⁸ H. B. Lees-Smith (ed.), *Encyclopedia of the Labour Movement* (London, Caxton, 1928), vol. 1, pp. 91-2.
- ⁵⁹ H. T-N. Gaitskell, *Chartism: An Introductory Essay* (London, Longmans, 1929), p. 32, 86.
- ⁶⁰ J. L. and B. Hammond, *The Age of the Chartists* (London, Longmans, 1930), pp. 271 and 282.
- ⁶¹ Chase, *Chartism*, pp. 227-9.
- ⁶² B. Dobrée, *English Revolts* (London, Joseph, 1937), pp. 160-1.
- ⁶³ G. D. H. Cole, *Chartist Portraits* (London, Macmillan, 1941), p. 33.
- ⁶⁴ T. Rothstein, *From Chartism to Labourism: Historical Sketches of the English Working Class Movement*, (London, Lawrence & Wishart, 1983; first published 1929), p. 2.
- ⁶⁵ Rothstein, *Chartism to Labourism*, pp. 1, 35, 50.
- ⁶⁶ J. Saville, 'Introduction' to Rothstein, *Chartism to Labourism*, p. xviii. See also Chase, *Chartists*, pp. 15-21, on which this and some preceding paragraphs are based.