

Depth Study I – The Chartist Movement, c.1830-1850

SOURCE A: A speech by Thomas Attwood in 1839 in support of the first Chartist Petition

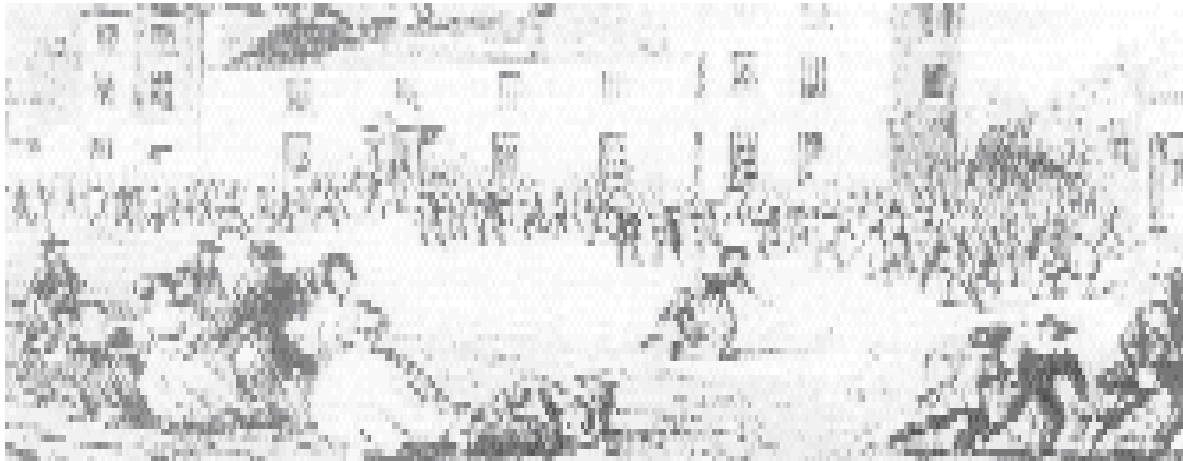
This petition is now presented to the House of Commons with 1,280,000 signatures, the result of no fewer than 500 meetings. The men who signed this petition were honest and hard working but no attempt has been made by this House to help them. Although I strongly support this petition, I am against any appeal to physical force. I am against all talk of armed rebellion.

SOURCE B: Taken from a speech by Feargus O'Connor in the 1840s.

My desire is to try moral force as long as possible, but I would have you remember that it is better to die free men than to live as slaves. Physical force is treason only when it fails; it is glorious freedom when it is successful.

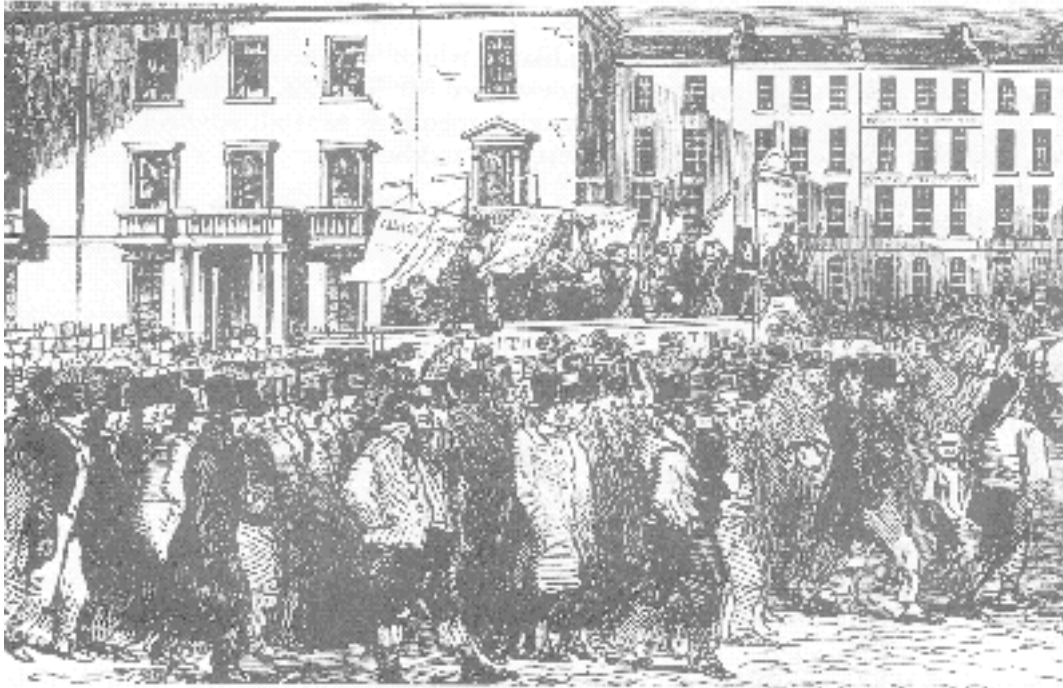
SOURCE C: From the autobiography 'The Life and Struggles of William Lovett', published in 1876. In this extract he is quoting from views he expressed in the 1840s.

The use of physical force is harmful to the movement. Muskets are not what are wanted, but education and schools for working people. Stephens and O'Connor are shattering the movement. O'Connor wants to take everything by storm, and to make the Charter law within a year. All this hurry and haste! Armed men can only lead to the destruction of Chartism.



SOURCE D: A contemporary drawing of the Newport Rising of 1839.

SOURCE E: A contemporary drawing of the peaceful Chartist demonstration on Kennington common in 1848



SOURCE F: From the book “*Chartism*” by Edward Royle, 1980.

Leadership was vital to the growth of Chartism, if not to its failure, for its leaders decided the policies and direction of the movement. Without leaders like Lovett, Attwood, O'Connor, Cooper and many others, Chartism would have been very different, if it had existed at all. Historians find it difficult to write a balanced account of Chartism because most of the sources were written by the Chartist leaders themselves.