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JOSEPH COWEN OF NEWCASTLE AND RADICAL LIBERALISM

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A THESIS SUBMITTED IN PARTIAL FULFILMENT OF THE
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JOSEPH COWEN OF NEWCASTLE AND RADICAL LIBERALISM

This thesis emanated from a conviction that major gaps in our knowledge of Liberal history remain, especially in the realm of regional politics. The research aims to challenge the widely held view that Tyneside was a bastion of Liberalism for the greater part of the nineteenth century. Summary electoral statistics are shown to be wholly unreliable as a description of the prevailing political ethos. The dynastic dominance of the Cowen family and, in particular, the salutary influence of Joseph Cowen Jnr.(1829-1900) ensured that Tyneside retained its strong radical tradition. ✓

The work begins by identifying the powerful agrarian and international roots of local politics and highlighting the pivotal role of Thomas Spence. Tyneside was demonstrably in the vanguard of early nineteenth century movements, notably the 1832 Reform Act campaign and Chartism. In 1848, Cowen redirected radical energies into the cause of European nationalism and subsequently regenerated electoral reform through the formation of the Northern Reform Union. Politically ambitious, he sought to win the confidence and loyalty of the working classes by involving himself in a plethora of 'improving' organisations. He actively encouraged mechanics institutes to adopt a democratic structure and was responsible for introducing Cooperation into the region in 1859. Under his proprietorship, the Newcastle Chronicle became a powerful medium for the dissemination of radical ideas, thus extending his influence far beyond the immediate locality.

By 1873, Cowen's charismatic leadership was a reckonable force, uniquely strengthening his bargaining position and making him powerbroker of the Radical/Liberal alliance. The Irish dimension of Tyneside politics, it is argued, was extremely important. Elsewhere, the Irish vote proved to be notoriously unpredictable. His staunch defence of Irish interests, and close friendship with prominent Irish nationalists ensured that all the available Irish votes were pledged in his favour. The thesis concludes by appraising Cowen's apparent conversion to an imperialist foreign policy, and considers how far this constituted a compromise of his patriotic radical principles.

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INTRODUCTION

At the end of the 1850's the Liberal Party which emerged was a loose alliance of divergent opinions. Generally speaking, the party was dominated by a large Whig section, a wealthy, right wing group of landowners who monopolised most of the key political posts, and a much smaller radical group who represented the nonconformist, manufacturing interests of the new industrial constituencies. Throughout the nineteenth century the Liberals were able to consistently appeal to a broad cross section of the British public, and elicit massive popular support. For many years historians have been preoccupied with the problem of explaining the phenomenon of popular Liberalism. The proffered explanations appraised working class political allegiances in all their complexity and were appropriately wide ranging and diverse. And yet, notwithstanding the inevitable differences of interpretation, most evinced a common tendency to regard popular Liberalism as a point of departure from earlier political traditions.¹ In short, in order to positively establish the decline of revolutionary fervour and the concomitant harmonization of class relations there was a perceived requirement to demonstrate that radicalism was a moribund, or at least decaying, force in 1848.² Even though there is now a much broader consensus in favour of a more gradualist approach, the prevalent emphasis upon discontinuity still attracts a number of adherents.³

More recently however, significant revisionary work has posed a serious challenge to the existing orthodoxy. A number of important biographical and local studies have presented a compelling argument in favour of investing radicalism with far greater resilience and longevity than had previously been considered possible.⁴ As early as 1967, a study of the life of Robert Lowery noted the detectable 'compatibility of Chartist aims and mid-Victorian Liberal

ideology'.⁵ Subsequently, Kate Tiller's survey of late Halifax Chartism⁶, and Bill Lancaster's meticulous analysis of Leicester Radicalism⁷, pursued a similar theme and concluded that in areas where Chartism had been vigorous a radical strain of Liberalism was much more likely to emerge. Both works highlight the valuable insights that local studies can, and do, offer. If, as Kate Tiller has observed, the 1850's and 1860's were 'characterised by increasingly localised responses to differing conditions'⁸, any serious attempt to advance our understanding of popular Liberalism and radicalism must begin with a closer scrutiny of individual localities.⁺

A new collection of studies, Currents of Radicalism (1991), which draws on a substantial body of local material, has added scholarly weight to the view that popular radicalism had a significant impact upon the Gladstonian Liberal Party and nascent socialism.⁹ E. Biagini and A. Reid not only eschew the materialist interpretation epitomised by the work of Eric Hobsbawm¹⁰, but also distance themselves from the essentially 'irrational' approach favoured by John Vincent and Martin Pugh.¹¹ Instead, their attempt to reconstruct the radical past by focusing more upon language and semiotics displays an indebtedness to the seminal work of Gareth Stedman Jones.¹² Individually, and collectively, the studies constitute an illuminating profile of the designated 'new model radicals' whose modified aims and strategies are considered to have more perfectly conformed with those of Gladstonian Liberalism by the dawn of the 1880's.¹³ The primary contention here is that, while the profile has considerable claim to validity in the general sense, it cannot be applied quite so successfully to the Cowenite Radicalism which dominated Tyneside politics throughout the period. Indeed, one of the more revealing features of these studies is the recurrent identification of Tyneside as an exceptional case.¹⁴

This thesis would seek to endorse the present consensus that radicalism remained a reckonable force in British politics but, at the same time, would challenge the view that it invariably assumed the subordinate role in the political alliances that were negotiated. Instead, as will be shown, radicalism on Tyneside survived in a form which displayed rather more oppositional characteristics than can be equated with the conformist mutation which passed muster elsewhere. No claim to prototypicality will be advanced. On the contrary, the objective here is to throw into sharp relief the extent to which Tyneside Radicalism was unique. Given that the burden of proof rests upon establishing the prior existence of a vigorous and resilient tradition, some of what follows must appraise the nature of Tyneside politics in the early part of the century. Although Tyneside Radicalism subsequently became personally identified with Joseph Cowen, it will be argued that he was not the progenitor, but a legatee. There was no question of his setting a fundamentally new radical agenda; his role was that of educator, skilful tactician and charismatic leader.

Comparatively speaking, Tyneside working class politics have been a somewhat neglected field of study in the past. For example, Middlesbrough, not Newcastle, was featured in Asa Briggs seminal study Victorian Cities.¹⁵ Antiquarian accounts predictably yielded little beyond a bald narrative of events and for many years perceptions of Tyneside Radicalism were coloured by a general tendency to exaggerate the disconnectedness of episodes of heightened political activity.¹⁶ Although a valuable corrective has been provided by several new studies¹⁷ their analyses are mainly confined to the first half of the century. In the event, they cannot address the glaring incongruity of Tyneside's notably aggressive radical tradition with its apparent emergence as one of the bastions of popular Liberalism.

The explanation of this incongruity may be said to lie within the bounds of two possible scenarios: Either the earlier radical tradition was intrinsically weaker than the available evidence suggests, and there was a general willingness to renounce or modify some, if not all, of its guiding principles; Or, the accepted representation of Tyneside as a Liberal stronghold is inherently misleading, and local radicals wielded a far greater share of political power than has been previously recognised. The research clearly had to tackle both possibilities. The first necessitated a thorough scrutiny of local radicalism which would carefully chart its progress from the period of the 1832 Reform Act, and precisely identify its guiding principles. Any claim for a significant continuity of radicalism rested upon whether those same principles could be shown to be as politically compelling in the 1880's as they had been in the earlier period. To that end, a linguistic approach, which included symbolic modes of communication as well as written and spoken language, was considered to be one of the more useful avenues of research.¹⁸

Testing the workings of the Radical/Liberal alliance was perceived to be a more complex task. If the Radicals were to be identified as the power brokers of the alliance, then the source of that power had to be located in the personality of Joseph Cowen, who was the senior member for Newcastle from 1874 until his retirement in 1886. Not only was there a need to define his sphere of influence, but there was an obvious requirement to determine whether it was sufficiently large to enable him to retain an independent position as a committed Radical. As so much of the national historiography has been driven by a strong emphasis upon charismatic leadership,¹⁹ it seemed altogether pertinent to consider whether Cowen's leadership could be viewed in that light. Revisionary studies have repudiated the irrational basis of that charisma and, instead, claim that it depended upon 'moral empathy, ideological

affinity and established reputations based on actual achievements'.²⁰ This last appeared to offer sound criteria for testing Cowen's authority and control over the local movement.

Ultimately, Cowen's ability to exert a political influence over the panoply of working class organisations was judged to be crucial. Tyneside had an extremely rich organisational life and the working classes were well served with mechanics institutes, Temperance clubs, and friendly societies. The Cooperative Movement, considered by Harold Perkin to be paradigmatic of the process by which the working classes were diverted into the 'paths of social ambition rather than protest',²¹ had a significant impact upon working class culture in the North East. All the available evidence indicated that the radical aims and activities of local 'improving' organisations demonstrably ran counter to the liberal ethos so noticeable elsewhere. Moreover, the crossover of membership which Cowen actively encouraged, especially through his newspapers, ensured that his plan for the creation of a militant democracy reached an ever-widening body of support.

In this way, the political landscape of nineteenth century Tyneside was judged to embody cultural signposts which were just as relevant to the continuity of radicalism as they were to the growth of a hegemonic Liberalism. Dissent, which John Vincent described as one of the 'great standing armies which bound men to serve under the Liberal flag',²² was firmly rooted in the North East, especially in the Northumberland and Durham coalfields.²³ It is not without some significance that trade unionism should be singled out by Harold Perkin as the only working class institution that did not become an 'instrument of working class amelioration'.²⁴ Organised dissent was inextricably bound up in the well organised labour movement which, among other things, produced the Miners Associated of Great Britain and Ireland (MAGBI) in 1842,

and consistently provided the mass following for a plethora of later radical activities. The regional bias towards labour intensive industries such as heavy engineering and mining proved to be an important contributory factor. The question of whether miners did or did not play a major role in local Chartism has been the subject of considerable scholarly debate.²⁵ Despite the persuasive arguments that miners had only minimal involvement, the available evidence would seem to suggest otherwise; the active participation of miners at all levels contributed to the remarkable cohesiveness of local radicalism.

The cohesion of radical politics cannot, of course, be fully understood without due reference to the salutary impact of Tyneside's large Irish population. Potentially, the Irish could have been an extremely divisive force. In the event, Cowen's espousal of the Irish cause, his close friendship with Nationalist M.P.'s, and his outspoken defence of Home Rule protected local radicalism from schism and reaped dividends at the polls. In other 'Irish' areas, notably Lancashire, prevalent sectarianism had fuelled a strong Tory reaction in 1874.²⁶ The relative quiescence of Anglo-Irish relations on Tyneside, requires explanation. The premise here is that Irish politics interacted in a positive way with the agrarianism that lay at the heart of local radicalism. As a result of Cowen's positive intervention, radical interests became so interwoven with that of the Irish as to be scarcely distinguishable.

In the final analysis, this study of Tyneside Radicalism could not advance our understanding of nineteenth century politics unless some pertinent comparisons were drawn. Although the ample secondary literature was a valuable resource, the strength of comparisons such as these often depends upon access to fine contextual detail. In this respect, access to other related theses was considered essential. Of those which directly focused upon the North East,

much was gleaned from Keith Wilson's sociological survey of North East radicalism.²⁷ This thesis, which argued for the greater complexity and diversity of radicalism, also highlighted the way that local rather than national issues were the chief determinant of electoral affiliations. Greater insight into the dynamics of late nineteenth century Tyneside politics was provided by both E.I.Waitt²⁸ and A.Blake²⁹. The Waitt thesis, which scrutinized the Liberal/Radical alliance between 1873-95, drew attention to the way that Cowen's candidature "destroyed the old politics of influence"³⁰ and revealed many of the tensions, personal and ideological, between the leading protagonists. The divisiveness of the 1870 Education Act was thrown into sharp relief by Anthony Blake in a thesis which carefully charted its impact upon radical activity on Tyneside and in Birmingham. In addition, a number of MA dissertations were consulted. E.D.Spraggon's attempt to define Cowenite Radicalism more precisely was helpful, not least because he was able to identify the source of many of Cowen's political ideas.³¹ And, a rigorous study of the Irish in County Durham and Newcastle by R.J.Cooter³² gave an excellent account of the complexities of Anglo-Irish relationships and a welter of invaluable statistical information. Finally, the Keith Harris Manuscript supplied a comprehensive appraisal of Cowen's family background and early political career.³³

From a broader perspective, the question of whether party political independence was mere rhetoric in the latter part of the nineteenth century was the focus of a thesis by P.M.Gurowich.³⁴ As a benchmark of what degree of independence was possible - given the constraints of an increasingly sophisticated party machine - Gurowich's study helped to locate Cowen's continued resistance to encroachments upon his political freedom. In much the same way, P.Jones delineated the important correlation between national and municipal office.³⁵ Using a comparative approach, Jones concluded that while party was the key

factor in gaining local office in Leicester after 1880, family connections continued to be the primary determinant in Peterborough. The continuity of Leicester Radicalism has already been referred to above and A.Little's rigorous critique may be considered a welcome contribution to literature on the subject.³⁶ Undoubtedly, Little's detailed reconstruction of radical activity between 1842 and 1874, helped to clarify a number of issues and greatly facilitated the comparative process.

The principal source for this research was The Cowen Papers which are held at the Tyne and Wear Archives, and comprise a formidable collection of letters and documents spanning the period from 1833 to 1937. Unfortunately, they do not contain any personal ephemera and little or no information about Cowen's family life or social activities can be gleaned from them. Jane Cowen who collated her father's impressive collection of documents after his death in 1900, ruthlessly censored all of the personal correspondence. Furthermore, Cowen himself deliberately destroyed most of the material which referred to his clandestine republican activities, particularly those papers which related to his involvement in the Orsini plot to assassinate Louis Napoleon in 1858. Understandably, he judged the correspondence to be much too sensitive. Nevertheless, despite the lamentable loss of some documents, The Cowen Papers are an unusually rich resource which offer rare insights into a wide range of radical activities and campaigns. The Minute Book of the Northern Reform Union (1858-62), for example, charts the day to day progress of the campaign, while the accompanying correspondence is a testimony to Cowen's wider aim to regenerate the call for reform in every major town and city. The activities of the Reform League are equally well documented giving both a national and a local perspective of the events surrounding the Second Reform Act. On the

domestic front there is extensive information related to working class organisational and associational life. Cowen's involvement in Temperance activities, mechanics institutes and, in particular, his role in the spread of Cooperation in the North East are all clarified in numerous letters, memoranda and circulars.

The importance of The Cowen Papers lies mainly in the detailed information they provide of Cowen's extensive network of radical and revolutionary contacts. Thus letters from Bright and Chamberlain, Holyoake and Harney are held alongside those from Mazzini and Garibaldi, Kossuth and Kropotkin. This correspondence gives the papers a relevance and value which extends beyond the usual parameters of political memorabilia. Membership lists of both foreign and domestic radical movements were particularly useful, not least because some proved to be short-term initiatives and the available published information tends to be sparse and piecemeal. And, as might be expected, Cowen's career as an M.P. can be readily charted from extensive transcripts of his parliamentary speeches, together with related correspondence from his political colleagues.

Insights into Cowen's life and career, and the maturation of Cowenite Radicalism, were greatly amplified by the extensive files of Cowen's newspapers, The Newcastle Daily Chronicle & The Weekly Chronicle. His editorial control was particularly in evidence in the pages of The Daily Chronicle which also carried his regular 'London Letter' column. And given that the Chronicle offices operated as strategic headquarters for a multitude of local movements and campaigns it was much more easy to identify the central preoccupations of the main activists.

Naturally, there was a need to extend the survey and look at other political papers. The Mundella Papers, The Leader Correspondence and The Henry

Joseph Wilson Collection held at Sheffield University helped to clarify many of the issues related to the workings of the Radical/Liberal alliance. The Mundella Papers are mainly taken up by correspondence with prominent members of the Liberal Party and local Liberal Association executives, but there is also a good deal of interesting and informative material related to his work as a leading arbitrator. Mundella's correspondence also includes letters to his many literary and aristocratic friends. Of themselves, they are not very helpful but as a collection they do throw considerable light upon his political and social ambitions.

The Leader Correspondence greatly illuminated the role of the Liberal press, and the extent to which Mundella was dependent upon Robert Leader's good offices in providing sympathetic and favourable publicity. As might be expected, all three collections are complementary and can be usefully scrutinized together. Studied in this way, the intricate relationship between them was elucidated and Wilson's lesser role in Sheffield politics was more easily understood. In addition, Wilson's criticism of official Liberal policy, over Ireland and Afghanistan, clarified those areas of remaining tension between them.

At the outset, I decided that a thematic approach would be the most appropriate method of tackling the complexities of Cowen's political career. It was hoped that this would prevent the snares and pitfalls of undue and tiresome repetition. As little sense could be made of what was to follow unless some background information was provided, Chapter 1 adheres more closely to a chronological structure than the remaining sections. The objective here is to identify the key formative influences which helped to shape and mould Cowen's political philosophy. His radical family background, the

progressive education he received and the politics of his local community are all judged to have contributed, to a greater or lesser degree. The radical credentials of Winlaton, where Cowen grew up, is perceived to have been particularly important. The political activities of both parents provided Cowen with an early radical education, while their circle of friends introduced him to the activist network which he himself utilized later on. Although too young to participate in Tyneside Chartism, he would have been familiar with the issues at stake, and the bitter Miners' Strike of 1844 clearly had a lasting impact. His undergraduate days at Edinburgh, under the guidance of a prominent Chartist, clearly heightened his awareness of radical causes such as Anti-slavery and it was at this stage that Cowen first discovered an interest in republicanism.

Chapter 2 is more broadly focused, the intention being to explore the roots of Tyneside Radicalism and survey its later progress. Beginning with the important influence of Thomas Spence in the eighteenth century, Tyneside is shown to have been in the vanguard of a number of radical movements, not least the 1832 Reform Act campaign and Chartism. The central agrarian and international themes that dominated local radicalism are identified and the importance of strong leadership is shown to have significantly contributed to its longevity and resilience, especially after 1848 when radicalism elsewhere seemed to be largely dissipated. Cowen's role in redirecting radical energies into the cause of European Nationalism, and the formation of the Northern Reform Union is perceived to be of pivotal importance.

Chapter 3 appraises Cowen's popular power base and considers the importance of his influence over a plethora of working class organisations, across the spectrum of work and leisure. The analysis focuses mainly upon the major 'improving' organisations such as cooperatives, mechanics institutes and

Temperance societies and challenges the view that they were disseminators of the 'entrepreneurial ideal'. The role of the Cowen Press in publicizing their meetings and encouraging a crossover of membership is highlighted, as is the sympathetic coverage of local trade union disputes and activities such as the Nine hours Strike(1871).

Chapter 4 considers the relationship between the resilience of Tyneside Radicalism and the presence of an unusually large Irish population. Largely because of Cowen's intervention, the local Irish community is shown to have achieved a remarkable level of integration. The sectarianism which bedevilled other 'Irish areas' was never a serious problem and the cohesiveness and ideological strength of Tyneside Radicalism was substantially reinforced by their willingness to support local activities and campaigns. In particular, the Irish vote which was consistently cast in Cowen's favour, is considered to have been sufficiently large to free him from the political constraints that Radical M.P.s laboured under elsewhere.

Chapter 5 appraises Cowen's local popularity and considers whether his leadership of local radicalism can be described as charismatic. His challenge for the candidacy is charted and the workings of constituency politics analysed in an attempt to consider the importance of having local connections, wealth and influence. Cowen is considered to have been the powerbroker in the Radical/Liberal alliance that was reached in 1873. The tendency to regard Tyneside as a 'Liberal' constituency between 1873-1886 is thus judged to be fundamentally misleading. Cowenite Radicalism, it is claimed, dominated local politics until after 1886. The tensions within the local Liberal Association and Cowen's deteriorating relationship with Gladstone and the Liberal Party are examined. The Caucus system, the Eastern Question and the Liberal's Irish policy are identified as the primary cause of the unbreach-

-able rift which prompted him to relinquish his parliamentary seat.

Chapter 6 examines the apparent confusion of Cowen's politics in the 1880's as he becomes increasingly associated with imperialist politics. The jingoism which surfaced in 1876 at the time of the Eastern Crisis is contrasted with the activities of the 'Peace Party' and careful consideration is given to Hugh Cunningham's argument that patriotism was by then increasingly identified with right wing politics.³⁷ Cowen's motivation in advocating an imperialist foreign policy is judged to be extremely complex. The insidious workings of Social Darwinism are highlighted, and Cowen is shown to have shared the widely held view that Britain had a duty to bring civilization and christianity to other nations of the world. His long-standing friendship with European and Irish nationalists is also believed to have inspired his own burgeoning nationalism. Ultimately, the increasing diversion of radical energies into single issue, sectional campaigns disappointed him, and after 1886 prompted him to look for a new field of endeavour.

The final chapter represents an attempt to draw some pertinent comparisons with other important centres of urban radicalism. The appraisal, which examines the differing experiences of Birmingham, Sheffield and Leicester, considers the relative strengths of their leaders, as well as scrutinizing the workings of the Radical/Liberal alliance. The republican sympathies of Cowen and P.A.Taylor are judged to have strengthened radicalism in Newcastle and Leicester, as did the Cooperative movement which also generated massive support. This is sharply contrasted with the noticeable lack of enthusiasm for Cooperation displayed by Birmingham and Sheffield radicals. The press in all three cities studied is shown to have served the interests of the Liberal Party. Unlike Cowen, who owned and controlled his own newspaper, Mundella, Chamberlain and Taylor were all too dependent upon the goodwill of others to

provide a platform for their policies and generate popular support, and their negotiating position was thus considerably weaker. Cowen's charismatic leadership which ensured the cohesiveness of the local movement, is cited as the primary factor in his ability to maintain an independent political stance. Radicalism in the North East, as a result of Cowen's intervention, retained its traditional roots and continued to be the politics of opposition.

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CHAPTER 1. THE EARLY LIFE OF JOSEPH COWEN: ORIGINS AND INFLUENCES

The principal aim of this research is to explore the development and progress of Cowenite Radicalism and assess its impact upon nineteenth century Tyneside politics. Clearly, the progressive attitudes and beliefs that composed Joseph Cowen's distinctive style of radical politics cannot be rendered intelligible unless an attempt is made to identify the formative influences which helped to shape them. To a large extent, the political philosophy he preached in later life can be directly ascribed to his upbringing at the hands of parents who were both radical activists, and to the enlightened education they provided for him. Most of all, Cowen seems to have assimilated that potent amalgam of chauvinism and radicalism for which the Winlaton community was so renowned.¹ As John Vincent has observed 'for most people politics was the politics of the town in which they lived their lives'.²

At the beginning of the nineteenth century, Winlaton was an isolated though well-populated village on the outskirts of Tyneside. The Crowley Iron Works established in 1691 had long dominated the local landscape and the lives of the inhabitants.³ With a reputation both at home and abroad for producing high quality manufactured goods, the Crowley Works were extremely prosperous until the ending of the Napoleonic Wars wrought severe economic dislocation. By then, it seems, the Works were no longer being efficiently managed and the over-dependence on military contracts proved disastrous.⁴ Unable to compete effectively the Winlaton Works were finally closed, producing serious hardship and, more crucially, a strong political reaction. In the aftermath 'Crowley's Crew', as the workers were known, abandoned their Tory loyalties and embraced a strident and uncompromising radicalism.⁵

This ideological somersault emanated from more than just economic privation; the entire social fabric of the village was affected by the firm's

collapse. The paternalist experiments introduced by Sir Ambrose Crowley had transformed the village of Winlaton into a model community, with a panoply of innovative social and welfare provisions. Education and medical facilities, and a progressive benefit system provided villagers with an exceptional degree of social and economic security, and although Crowley assumed overall responsibility for his workers' daily needs, this was not just patronage; both employer and employed gained from the consequent stability and the costs of most services were met by joint contributions.⁶ The highly skilled workforce which included women nailmakers, were paid high wages and all disputes were settled by an appointed Arbitrators Court.⁷ Crowley's factory system had helped to instil a spirit of independence and a strongly rooted artisanal pride; the closure of the Works had a deep and lasting impact, creating a climate of intense class antagonism as workers were forced to accept the less favourable working conditions imposed upon them by their new employers.⁸ In the event, the political deference⁹ engendered by the Crowley ethos of mutuality was rapidly abandoned for an aggressive radicalism, firmly rooted in a profound sense of injustice and fuelled by a nostalgic desire to recapture a seemingly halcyon past.

Winlaton radicals were noticeably in the forefront of local demonstrations protesting against the Peterloo Massacre of 1819¹⁰, while the concealed arms that were carried were reputedly manufactured in the village by some of Crowley's former iron workers who had set up their own independent blacksmith workshops.¹¹ In 1832, the Winlaton contingent made their commitment to the reform campaign emphatically clear when they marched to the demonstration at Spital Fields bearing immense oak saplings.¹² And, when the reform campaign coalesced into organised Chartism at the beginning of 1838, their presence at meetings was invariably singled out for special recognition. Dr. John Taylor's

address at the Christmas Day meeting thus began with a tribute to the men of Northumberland and Durham 'and you men of Winlaton who in 1819 so nobly did your duty'¹³. The Winlaton Band were constantly pressed into service¹⁴ to supply the martial music considered so important a feature of local Chartist gatherings while the Winlaton women, too, received their share of praise for turning out in such large numbers.

Cowen's Northern Tribune gave this account of Winlaton's role in local Chartism:

In 1839 it was the headquarters of Chartism in the North East. During the incipient rebellion of that year, pikes and other warlike instruments were made in large numbers by the Winlaton smiths, many of whom were employed exclusively in their manufacture for some time. Almost all the leaders of the movement visited the village and were feted in grand style. The Sacred Month was better observed in Winlaton than most places and few villages in the district contributed so formidable a contingent to the 'Battle of the Forth'....¹⁵

Even if Cowen's flattering account is discounted as over-exuberant pride in his native village, contemporary newspaper reports verify that Winlaton Chartism was of the 'physical force' variety. At a meeting in June 1839, when 'the whole village was on the qui vivre', banners bore the uncompromising warning that they were there to demand their liberty, by force if necessary:

'Hereditary Bondsmen, know ye not Who would be free themselves must strike the blow'¹⁶ And, the decision of the Winlaton Political Union to circulate a special address to their 'Brother Radicals of the United Kingdom' is an indication of their strength of that resolve. 'Fellow Slaves' were offered every assistance and reminded that the resort to arms had enabled the United States to win their independence.¹⁷ That the village could act as host to nationally prominent Chartists such as Julian Harney and Dr. Taylor speaks

volumes for Winlaton's reputation as a 'bastion of revolutionary politics'.¹⁸ It was into this hotbed of political radicalism that Cowen was born and spent his formative years, and doubtless culled many of his more revolutionary notions.

Although at the turn of the century the Cowen family were scarcely distinguishable from any other skilled working class family in Winlaton, in the space of three or four decades they had acquired sufficient wealth and status as to give them significant local influence. Cowen's grandfather, John, had worked for Crowley's before setting up his own blacksmiths and his father, Sir Joseph Cowen, had begun life as an apprentice chain-maker before joining the family business.¹⁹ The propitious marriage of Joseph's sister, Mary, to a local brick manufacturer in 1819 provided the opportunity for him to become a businessman in his own right. Underhand dealings were rumoured but there seems little doubt that his entrepreneurial skills were responsible for the brickyard's continuing success. Capitalizing on the the growing demand for clay goods and the availability of fine quality, iron-free clay at Blaydon Burn, he painstakingly developed and patented a unique firebrick which won several awards at the Great Exhibition. As the business grew profitable and expanded into national and international markets he began to invest his spare capital in other lucrative ventures. Beginning with a colliery at Blaydon Burn, he gradually acquired coal staithes, a small railway line and a number of substantial tracts of neighbouring land.²⁰

By the time Joseph Cowen was born in 1829 the family had already begun to acquire the capital, property and disposable income that would enable them to move in smart middle class circles. The family had by then purchased a large house near the brickworks at Blaydon Burn, a small hamlet on the outskirts of Winlaton which consisted of little more than a cluster of

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workmen's cottages. According to Cowen's daughter Jane, the men employed in the brickyard 'lived as neighbours to their employer and his children'.²¹ The relative isolation of the Blaydon Burn community seems to have bred an easy familiarity:

Joseph reputedly often escaped from his mother to help push the tubs of clay. Many a time the servant lass caught him and took him home, washed him and changed him. He always managed to elude her.²²

There is even a local legend that Cowen was born in one of those same workmen's cottages²³ but whether there is any truth in this or not, Cowen's childhood certainly gave him the intimate understanding of working class life and experiences which was to inform so much of his later politics. He was, of course, much too young to have participated in early Chartism but he must have garnered something of the strength of local feeling from the children he mixed with so freely. In particular, the prolonged and bitter mining strike in 1844 must have had a lasting impact. The Great Strike, as it was called afterwards, led to violent clashes as blackleg labour were recruited and local miners families were summarily evicted. As Robert Colls notes, what began as a dispute over pay and conditions 'ended as a straight fight for trade unionism in the coalfield'.²⁴

These important childhood experiences were reinforced by the political education he received first-hand from his own parents, and through their friendship with prominent local radicals who were frequent visitors to the family home at the time when he was perhaps most impressionable. Some of these radical connections had been forged in 1819 when his father had led his 'class' of Winlaton blacksmiths at the Peterloo demonstrations on the Town Moor.²⁵ In addition, his membership of the locally prestigious Northern

Political Union (NPU), which is said to have played a pivotal role in securing the successful passage of the Great Reform Act²⁶, brought him into contact with activists such as Thomas Doubleday, Charles Larkin and Charles Attwood. Much later, in the 1850's, Cowen was able to capitalize upon his easy familiarity with this older generation of radicals, drawing them into his Foreign Affairs Committee and the Northern Reform Union.²⁷ Doubleday, especially, became a regular correspondent and Cowen used him as a sounding board for some of his reform ideas and strategies.

Cowen's mother was no less politically aware. Mary Newton had been born into a poor Methodist family and although she had received little formal education she was an avid reader of political tracts.²⁸ Her brother Joseph, a shoemaker, was considered to be something of a 'political philosopher',²⁹ while Mary herself became leader of the Winlaton Female Reformers in 1819.³⁰ Her religious views were equally progressive and the couple reached the amicable compromise of having their children baptised alternately Anglican and Methodist.³¹ It is unfortunate that surviving accounts of Mary's life are so sketchy. Jane's manuscript biography of her father provides little additional information, and there is no factual evidence of her involvement in the Newcastle Female Political Union which was formed in 1839.³² In any event, by then she was the mother of six young children and it may have been more difficult for her to take an active role in local politics. The fact that Sir Joseph was just beginning to establish himself as a member of the local Whig oligarchy may also have been a contributory factor.

After 1832 the Cowen family politics became rather ambiguous. Sir Joseph is said to have 'engaged in a little social climbing', taking his family to society balls and soirees, and identifying himself with the Anti-Corn Law League and Poor Law Reform.³³ It is unclear whether this political

trimming was motivated by a desire to make advantageous business connections, or whether he harboured serious political ambitions which at that time would have required him to make some influential connections. It would be tempting to surmise that Mary Cowen's avoidance of these social functions indicated a continuing allegiance to the radicalism of her youth, but such speculation is unhelpful.³⁴ On the one hand, Sir Joseph's appointment to the Gateshead Board of Guardians suggests that he had no serious misgivings about implementing the Poor Law Amendment Act but, on the other, surviving records show the Board did press for substantial reforms during his time as Chairman. The petition that was presented to parliament on their behalf in 1845 bore the explicitly radical rejoinder that "the population having in exchange for their labour the inalienable right to existence from the land which gave them birth".³⁵ The Gateshead Observer boasted of the Board's largesse in not discriminating between the resident and casual poor, and asserted that "In no part of the kingdom can the Poor Law be more faithfully administered than in this and the neighbouring Union".³⁶ And, it is noteworthy that the Poor Law Board should consider it necessary to recommend some modification of the Gateshead Board's dietary provision, on the grounds that it was "decidedly higher in nutrient than the average".³⁷

Cowen paid this tribute to his father's political consistency after his death in 1873:

He preserved to the end the ardent political opinions of his youth and he died as earnest and advanced a Radical as he was when, fifty years ago, he marched at the head of his brother blacksmiths to the famous political gathering on the Town Moor. It sometimes happens that a change in a man's circumstances alters his political principles. That was not the case with the gentleman to whom I now refer.... I know of no man more conscientious in the beliefs he entertained, and more consistent in upholding them.³⁸

He would scarcely have welcomed any reminders of his father's flirtation with Whig orthodoxy, even if it had been short-lived. In the circumstances it could have proved extremely damaging and he was clearly at pains to present himself to the electorate as the 'natural' successor and rightful heir to the Radical candidacy. Political pragmatism apart, his father's reputation as an even-handed and generous employer, and his record of service to the Tyneside community, could have been justifiably interpreted as the practical application of radical principles. Sir Joseph was one of the few employers to continue the Crowley system of caring for their workers. Both disabled and elderly employees were provided with a pension which was further supplemented by the provision of accommodation and fuel. He also commissioned a row of cottages to house local widows, and when employment was scarce he organised work schemes such as the planting of Brockwell Wood at Blaydon Burn.³⁹ It was this kind of paternalism that was so much in evidence when Sir Joseph addressed a meeting of the Newcastle Farmers Union in 1850 and urged upon them "the importance of erecting cottages for those labourers in remote districts of Northumberland who are now compelled to live in mud hovels".⁴⁰ Beyond these immediate community concerns he also served as a Town Councillor and became Chairman of the influential River Tyne Commission, for which he was subsequently knighted.

Cowen learned to emulate his father's work ethic and dogged determination to succeed by dint of his own efforts, and to share his conviction that superior wealth and status carried with it a burden of responsibility that could not be shirked. "Power", he said, "to the very last particle of it, is duty".⁴¹ Like his father, he became a hardheaded entrepreneur who never allowed sentiment to interfere with the smooth running and expansion of his business interests. Although he always deplored the acquisition of

wealth for its own sake, he made no apology for his resolute pursuit of profits, arguing that "there may come a time when we must advocate a cause which does not meet with popular approval, then a balance at the bank is very useful".⁴² The possession of wealth, as Cowen discovered, had provided his father with an enviable degree of independence, and the concomitant opportunity to take a leading role in the social and political fabric of Tyneside life. Notwithstanding the sincerity of his desire to serve the local community, Cowen evinced a palpable thirst for power. Fortunately, he did not have to indulge in any sycophancy, or adjust his political principles in order to realise his ambitions; when the time came, he was able to follow in his father's footsteps with every conceivable advantage - money, status and political experience all helped to smooth his path.

The value system that informed Cowen's politics as he grew up was demonstrably a composite of the local radical tradition and the family's code of ethics. But, equally, the direction of his political and philosophical ideas was also determined by the progressive education he received. His first taste of school, as a boarder at Burnopfield, appears to have been uneventful. What is interesting is that he later came to be taught by Henry Allison, the former schoolmaster at Crowley's.⁴³ Before long, he had progressed to Mr. Weeks' Academy at Ryton. Weeks was no poor country tutor but a man of means, serving as a Poor Law Guardian and taking an active role in local politics.⁴⁴ More importantly, he was an innovative teacher who encouraged his students to read widely, and to engage in group discussion. And, it was Richard Weeks who, amongst other things, introduced Cowen to the literature of Walter Scott.

Most of all, Cowen grew intellectually and politically during his year as an undergraduate arts student at Edinburgh University. When Cowen took up his place there in November 1845, Edinburgh was the focus of religious

controversy and a hothouse of literary and philosophical debate. He boarded with his personal tutor, Dr. John Ritchie, who was a United Presbyterian Minister and a leading member of the Free Kirk Movement.⁴⁵ Even though his stay in Edinburgh proved to be relatively short-lived, this extrovert character exerted a powerful influence over Cowen. Ritchie was an important radical activist, taking a prominent part in local Chartism and often holding meetings in his chapel⁴⁶, as well as eloquently championing the causes of anti-slavery and Temperance. In his role as a Temperance preacher he was already well-known on the Newcastle circuit, lecturing for the local Teetotal Society in the early 1840's.⁴⁷ Through Ritchie, Cowen was brought into close contact with other Free Kirk leaders, such as Candlish and Chalmers.⁴⁸ Moreover, the Abolition of Slavery campaign was then just beginning to gather momentum and many of the leading protagonists visited Edinburgh, circulating tracts and delivering lectures. The speeches he heard by George Thompson, Thomas B. Wright and Frederick Douglass are said to have had "a profound influence",⁴⁹ and he became firmly committed to the "the total and immediate abolition of slavery, not just in the United States, but throughout the world".⁵⁰ This was no idle commitment. Alongside W.E. Adams,⁵¹ Cowen subsequently gave full press backing to the campaign of 1861/62, earning generous praise from the abolitionist William Lloyd Garrison for his efforts: "Many thanks to you for the handsome manner in which you introduced me to the people of Newcastle, through the columns of The Chronicle".⁵²

Although Cowen displayed little interest in his academic studies, beyond taking copious notes, he threw himself enthusiastically into the city's many radical causes and became Chairman of the University's Eclectic Debating Society. It was in his capacity as Chairman that Cowen brought forward a motion of censure, protesting against the Home Secretary's controversial

interference with the private mail of Joseph Mazzini, the renowned Italian nationalist.⁵³ Mazzini's letter had contained sensitive information regarding the nationalist activities of the Bandieri Brothers, and a storm of protest broke out when the brothers were executed by the Austrian government. Cowen wrote to Mazzini expressing his horror at the shootings. The "cordial and encouraging" reply he received marked the beginning of a prolific correspondence and a life-long commitment to the cause of Italian unification.⁵⁴ Mazzini introduced him to a network of European revolutionaries and the friendship, as Cowen recalled later, "influenced my political course".⁵⁵

By 1846, Cowen's professed 'ultra-radicalism' was beginning to cause his parents considerable anxiety. Dr. Ritchie, he wrote in his diary, had enabled him to see "many things in a different and better light".⁵⁶ His confession of radical beliefs was broad, encompassing the abolition of hereditary titles, sinecures, laws of entail, state churches, food taxes and slavery; and he declared himself committed to fight for the six points of the Charter, religious freedom and social reform. Clearly, some of his diary entries would have been considered highly seditious, especially the statement that "When governments fail to secure to the people life, liberty and the pursuit of happiness, it is their Right and their Duty to alter or abolish them".⁵⁷ Despite the unequivocal opposition of both family and friends, and his own fear that his political opinions would force him to leave home, he remained steadfastly "determined to stick fast to my present views".⁵⁸ Much to his discomfiture, attempts were made to persuade him to concentrate more on his studies and moderate his political views. His aunt was despatched to Edinburgh to ensure that he complied but, in the event, the ploy proved to be a conspicuous failure when she also became caught up in Edinburgh's religious warfare.⁵⁹

Why Cowen should have left Edinburgh in 1847 without completing his studies is not altogether clear. There are suggestions that he suffered from ill-health,⁶⁰ but the more likely explanation is that his parents were eager to channel his energies into more orthodox pursuits. According to Jane, his employment in the family business as a clerk had been planned long before his year at University and he was not given any opportunity to choose an alternative career.⁶¹ Working up to twelve hours a day, and frequently deputizing as manager in his father's absence, does not appear to have had the desired effect; it neither curtailed his political studies nor sapped his enthusiasm for radical causes. He took out a subscription to Harney's Democratic Review and The Red Republican, and joined the People's International League⁶² whose members included such radical luminaries as Thomas Cooper, W.J.Linton and Henry Vincent.⁶³ As a result, his network of radical contacts began to expand, helped on by his friendship with Mazzini and, of course, Julian Harney.⁶⁴

Although Cowen had produced a radical agenda of commitments by this stage, his politics were still in a state of flux. At the same time as he denounced the aristocracy in forthright and uncompromising terms, he yet expressed a naïve faith in the integrity of the middle classes. Citing Burns, Blake, Goldsmith and Cobden as examples, he claimed that "The strength and honour of a nation depends on her middle class".⁶⁵ However, within the space of a few brief years, he was forced to re-evaluate his opinions. Beginning in his own local community, Cowen embarked upon three reform projects at the end of 1847 and it was this experience, more than any other, which distanced him from the middle class gradualism espoused by his father and into a concerted campaign for fundamental working class reforms.

The least successful of these early ventures was the formation of

a branch of the Anti-State Church Association, 'for the liberation of religion from all state interference'.⁶⁶ Originally he had planned to hold a series of public meetings in the dissenting chapels of Winlaton and Blaydon, and to engage a representative of the parent association as guest lecturer. Several former radical activists were also invited to speak, including Charles Larkin, but unfortunately they all declined. In the event, Cowen was not able to generate enough local interest or raise the necessary subscriptions to make the project viable, and he was forced to abandon it.⁶⁷ He did not lose faith in the campaign even though it had proved to be an abject failure, and he continued to serve as a delegate by coordinating subscriptions in Newcastle.⁶⁸ In the early 1850's the Association merged with the Liberation Society, along with a number of other dissenting bodies, and under these new auspices became extremely influential.⁶⁹ The experience proved to be an important lesson in political expediency. Future campaigns, as he now appreciated, would have to be more carefully planned.

When he launched the Winlaton Sanitary Association shortly afterwards he deliberately cultivated the support of the most respected members of the community, thus defusing any potential opposition and ensuring that there would be no financial difficulties. Insanitary conditions were endemic at that time, and although medical opinion was beginning to attribute recurrent outbreaks of cholera to the polluted environment, improvements still depended upon local initiatives.⁷⁰ His father was appointed Chairman and, this time, Charles Larkin agreed to lend his support. In his opening speech Cowen appealed to the gathered residents to work cooperatively in the interests of the whole community. The Crowley ethics of mutuality were clearly to the fore, and had been intellectually enhanced by his regular subscription to The People's Journal.⁷¹ Deploing "the abundance of putrid heaps of dung and

stagnant pools", he accused the wealthy of shirking their responsibilities. For their part, working men were urged to be self reliant, to realise that "If you are to be elevated, you must do so yourselves".⁷² Subscriptions were fixed at the modest sum of 1/- per annum to encourage the widest possible participation. The success of the project is difficult to assess for beyond an account of the inaugural meetings there are no other surviving documents. Improvements could not have been very significant for in April 1850, when the Newcastle Guardian ran a series of articles on the condition of the working classes, Winlaton was still being described as an 'insanitary and dirty' village.⁷³

Ignorance, as Cowen was beginning to discover, was the greatest obstacle to progress and his decision to establish a Literary and Scientific Society in Winlaton emanated from a firm belief that "political bettering of the people must rest on the heels of moral and intellectual elevation. Education must be its precursor".⁷⁴ At that time, mechanics institutes tended to cater for the skilled working classes; subscriptions were prohibitive and lectures too high flown and intellectual.⁷⁵ Although Cowen's initial proposals suggested that the aims of the Winlaton Institute were not substantially different from those of other institutes, his opening address proved otherwise. Cowen's criterion that the Institute should be "open to all" was not just empty rhetoric:⁷⁶ women as well as men were to be admitted as members. Subscriptions and other levies were adjusted downwards and the original rules were revised to ensure that at least half of the committee were drawn from the working classes.⁷⁷ Within six months a similar institute had been established at Blaydon and Cowen embarked on a 'missionary' trail of all the outlying villages.⁷⁸ Success, and the prestige that flowed from it, fuelled his ambitions. While his own community was always the first to benefit from his initiatives (the first cooperative store was established in Blaydon in 1859),

he began to look for a much bigger challenge: "Our special field of labour will be the North of England, with Tyneside for our centre; our object the Education of the People."⁷⁹

As the 1840's drew to a close, local radicalism faced an uncertain future. The mass membership was dwindling fast and without a viable leadership it had begun to lose all sense of purpose and direction. Cowen was well placed to assume a leading role. He was sufficiently distanced from Tyneside Chartism to make a dispassionate assessment of its weaknesses and shortcomings. Sound local knowledge enabled him to capitalise on its existing ideological strengths, and his early experiences, in business and politics, equipped him to diagnose feasible tactics to ward off the encroachments of reformism. Initially, Temperance organisations provided a useful platform from which to launch his public image as a skilful mediator of middle and working class interests, while his quiet campaign to extend educational opportunities to isolated communities helped to produce the groundswell of support upon which his political career would ultimately rest.

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- 13.The Northern Liberator 29.12.1838.Report of a meeting at Sandhill, Ncle.
- 14.The Northern Liberator 15.9.1838; 15.6.1839;also T.A.Devyr:THE ODD BOOK OF THE NINETEENTH CENTURY (1882) p.180
- 15.The Northern Tribune Vol.1,p. 63.
- 16.The Northern Liberator 15.6.1839.
- 17.The Northern Liberator 3.11.1838; see also R.Colls op.cit p 282, noting that the Chartist Robert Lowery was presented with a Winlaton pike- 'a formidable weapon'.
- 18.N.Todd op.cit.p.25
- 19.To avoid confusion, Cowen's father will be referred to as Sir Joseph throughout, even though his Knighthood was not actually conferred until 1871.
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 45. Ibid.; N. Todd op.cit. p 26.
 46. Ibid.
 47. T. W. P. Tayldor: HISTORY OF THE RISE & PROGRESS OF TEETOTALISM IN NEWCASTLE (1885) notes that Ritchie lectured in Newcastle in 1841.
 48. K. Harris op.cit. p 9.
 49. Jane Cowen op.cit. p 9.
 50. COWEN PAPERS F12 July 1846: Joseph Cowen 'Notes, Hints and Observations on Daily Life'.
 51. For a detailed account of the life of W. E. Adams, who was Cowen's Editor at the Weekly Chronicle, see Owen R. Ashton: W. E. ADAMS: CHARTIST, RADICAL & JOURNALIST 1832-1906, (1991) For his involvement in abolition see p105/108
 52. COWEN PAPERS : D217. Letter William Lloyd Garrison to Cowen 8.1.1868.
 53. Jane Cowen Mss op.cit. chapter 6
 54. Ibid. also see N. Todd op.cit. p13; COWEN PAPERS have extensive documents relating to Cowen's friendship with Mazzini including a collection of letters 1860-1872.
 55. COWEN PAPERS E8 Letter Cowen to Major E. R. Jones 2.6.1885.
 56. COWEN PAPERS Joseph Cowen 'Notes, Hints and Observations' op.cit.
 57. Ibid.
 58. Ibid.
 59. Jane Cowen Mss Chapter 2.
 60. K. Harris op.cit Chapter 2, p 10(fn 98) states that Cowen was not expelled from University for his political activities.
 61. Jane Cowen Mss op.cit. p 39
 62. COWEN PAPERS A8, A9, A16: Address & correspondence of the People's Int. League
 63. THE LIFE OF THOMAS COOPER (1872), reprinted 1971; F. B. Smith: RADICAL ARTISAN:

- W.J.LINTON 1812-97 (1973); D.Vincent(Ed):TESTAMENTS OF RADICALISM:Memoirs of Working Class Politicians 1790-1885
- 64.F.G.& R.M.Black (Ed)THE HARNEY PAPERS (1969); COWEN PAPERS various,especially A241,A247. see also A.R.Schoyen:THE CHARTIST CHALLENGE (1958)
- 65.COWEN PAPERS F9 Joseph Cowen: Paper on 'The Tyranny of the Higher Classes' May 1846
- 66.Jane Cowen Mss -op.cit chapter3; COWEN PAPERS B15 British Anti-State Church Association:ALMANACK FOR THE TIMES (1851) states that the Association was formed in 1842 and the first meeting was held in London 30.4.1844.;also see J.Vincent op.cit for an account of its later history as part of the Liberation Society, pp 68-76; also D.M.Thompson:'The Liberation Society' in P.Hollis(Ed):PRESSURE FROM WITHOUT (1974)
- 67.Jane Cowen Mss op.cit.Chapter3 states that Cowen's handwritten Minutes 'came to an abrupt termination'.
- 68.COWEN PAPERS B15 Almanack op.cit.; The Newcastle Guardian,13.4.1850 carries a report of the second triennial conference in London.
- 69.see Chapter 4 for an appraisal of the Liberation Society's activities in Newcastle in the 1860's and 70's
- 70.R.Colls op.cit.appraises the insanitary condition of N.East colliery villages,pp 263-4; also see N.Kirk op.cit.pp108f for a review of public health initiatives in Manchester and Salford at mid century.
- 71.T.Tholfson:WORKING CLASS RADICALISM IN MID VICTORIAN ENGLAND (1976) noting that the articles in the Peoples Journal stressed the importance of mutual effort for the happiness of the community as a whole.It seems likely that Cowen drew on much of this material when preparing his speech.pp143,149
- 72.COWEN PAPERS D20,inaugural meeting; D23 26.1.1848 Report of the Winlaton & Blaydon Sanitary Association; Jane Cowen Mss Chapter 3, p.13.
- 73.Newcastle Guardian 27.4.1850.
- 74.COWEN PAPERS D57 Speech by Cowen 5.5.1852.
- 75.see J.F.C.Harrison:LEARNING AND LIVING (1961) ;N.Kirk op.cit.p190.
- 76.COWEN PAPERS D5 2.2.1847.
- 77.COWEN PAPERS August 1847.
- 78.Jane Cowen Mss op.cit chapter 4.
- 79.statement of objectives quoted in Cowen's Northern Tribune Vol1 January 1854.

CHAPTER 2: TYNESIDE RADICALISM: TRADITION AND PROGRESS 1775-1862

The main purpose of this chapter is to explore the roots of Tyneside Radicalism and survey its later progress. The available evidence indicates that the radical critique of society expressed by Newcastle born Thomas Spence (1750-1814) informed and underpinned all those popular protest movements and campaigns which dominated Tyneside political life throughout the nineteenth century.¹ Interpretations of regional politics have tended to stress the disconnectedness of early radical campaigns, dismissing them as a response to short term grievance by small, isolated minorities.² However, research suggests that these same minority groups were ideologically linked by a core membership, articulating shared concerns and aims. An attempt will be made to counter those arguments which tend to emphasise the inherent weakness of radicalism; its failure to sustain the Chartist Movement; its redundancy at the hands of an astute, manipulative government and subsequent absorption into Liberalism.³ The basic premise is that Tyneside Radicalism was a unique force, retaining its grip on local politics largely because of its deep-rooted internationalism - an element which appears to have been less significant in most other areas.⁴ In the circumstances, domestic reform alone could not emasculate a movement whose aims were so strongly dictated by notions of international brotherhood. Republicanism in the North East was not a brief interlude at mid century, but a persistent and strongly rooted strand of radical faith.⁵

Similarly, radical demands for the Charter were not adopted in the 1830's as part of a Chartist package and then readily relinquished in the doldrum days following the debacle of 1848. The clarion call for electoral reform originated much earlier on Tyneside. It was clearly articulated in the clamour of protest against the Peterloo Massacre, in the declarations of the

Political Protestants and the radical platform of the nationally influential Northern Political Union.⁶ Far from being consigned to the ashes, the rallying cry of radical forces in the 1850's and 1860's was 'The Charter and something more'.⁷ If the Radical/Liberal alliance is to be regarded as something of an ideological compromise, the accommodation was essentially with the newly formed Liberal Party, acting upon the clear recognition that the adoption of a radical programme was a prerequisite of political success.⁸ The activities of the Northern Reform Union unequivocally demonstrate the way that local radicals adhered to first principles throughout. In the space of a few short months the NRU successfully roused the North East and then went on to resurrect radical allegiances in cities such as Birmingham and Manchester where, to all intents and purposes, reform was a dead issue.⁹

Essentially, what is being stressed here is that radicalism on Tyneside did not wane at mid century but instead gathered new strength and a certain respectability. The vexed issue of 'physical force' Chartism has all too frequently served to cloud matters, the tendency being to view its advocacy as the apogee of radicalism, and the subsequent return to constitutional norms construed as clear evidence of diminishing fervour and a marked weakening of resolve.¹⁰ Physical force Chartism was a distinctive feature of the local movement, but the point which is often lost sight of is that the resort to violence was effectively an admission of defeat, the final recourse of those forced to confront their essential impotence. The radicalism of the 1850's and 60's expressed its dissent differently and, in a sense, more confidently. Some of this confidence can doubtless be ascribed to the rise of Cooperation which reinforced the complementary principles of self-help and independence, and to the proliferation of working class organisations such as mechanics institutes which, on Tyneside, were instrumental in sharpening

popular perceptions that 'knowledge is power'.¹¹ But, as I will argue, the crucial factor was local leadership. Joseph Cowen strengthened and shaped local radicalism almost beyond recognition. Nascent internationalism was nurtured by him through his long standing friendship with G.J. Harney and W.J. Linton, and his vast network of republican and revolutionary contacts. The 'something more' for which the radicals clamoured owed much to Cowen's boundless energy and dogged determination to achieve political and social reform.

At the outset, it must be stated that radicalism in the North East, as elsewhere, was not a nineteenth century phenomenon. Its roots stretch backwards into the eighteenth century and beyond. The primary concern here is not to trace a specific starting point, interesting though that might be, but rather having acknowledged that receptiveness to radical ideas was something of a local tradition, to examine more closely its later manifestation and progress.¹²

The importance of agrarianism as a vital strand of radical ideology can scarcely be overstated. As Gareth Stedman Jones argues, radicalism was 'first and foremost a vocabulary of political exclusion'.¹³ Given that this political exclusivity rested upon property qualification it is not altogether surprising that the contentious issue of land ownership should be of overriding concern to successive generations of radicals, or that they should rally to the call for land reform. Widespread popular support for O'Connor's Land Plan, Marx's Land and Labour League and Chamberlain's English Land Restoration League, to mention but a few, demonstrate the strength and tenacity of the response.¹⁴

For many years Tom Paine was generally considered to be the key figure in the development of radical ideas. Acknowledgements of the work of

Thomas Spence have been correspondingly thinner, the tendency being to stress the influence of the Spencean Philanthropists and their subsequent adaptation of Spence's ideas.¹⁵ The view put forward by Cole and Postgate, for instance, is typically dismissive:

..his importance lies not so much in himself as in the organisation he left behind, the 'Spencean Philanthropists' whose innocence was to enable the government's agents to use them for an exceedingly vile purpose.¹⁶

Recent attempts by P.M.Ashraf and Malcolm Chase to redress the balance are to be welcomed on a number of counts.¹⁷ In the first place, Chase's revision has effectively established the centrality of Spence's agrarian critique by demonstrating the considerable overlap with the ideas of Paine, and then laying stress upon Spence's altogether more rigorous approach.¹⁸ This in turn has prepared the ground for a substantial reappraisal of O'Connor and his Land Plan, long regarded as an aberration which seriously damaged the Chartist Movement.¹⁹ Of more immediate significance here, is the way that Chase has focused upon Spence's early Tyneside experiences thus placing local radicalism under the spotlight. Both Ashraf and Chase regard Spence as the product of an existing radical tradition, drawing from as well as contributing to the 'strong political consciousness' of late eighteenth century Tyneside.²⁰ The influence of Reverend James Murray (1732-82), leader of the High Bridge Presbyterian Congregation reputed for its 'advanced opinions', is said to have had a salutary effect.²¹ Ashraf claims that the Political Protestants of the 1820's can be traced back to that same dissenting community. Murray was an eloquent and influential radical who campaigned for electoral reform and a return to natural justice. As an editor and a publisher his polemic tracts obtained a wide circulation. Murray and Spence were also fellow members of the

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Philosophical Society. In 1775, when Spence delivered his famous lecture proposing agrarian reform, it was Murray who advocated its publication in pamphlet form and later vigorously challenged the Society for unjustly expelling him.²² Apart from the obvious influence of Murray, Spence's work also reflects his experience of key local events such as the dispute over enclosure of the Town Moor in 1771, and the 1774 elections. The judgement embodied in the Town Moor Act (1774) was regarded as an irrefutable vindication of the ancient rights of the people and celebrated with numerous demonstrations and ceremonies.²³ The elections of the following year were notable not simply for Murray's vigorous satire of the rampant corruption, but for the adoption of a radical electoral pledge which anticipated the Charter on three counts: shorter parliaments, fairer representation and an extension of the franchise. Ashraf notes that while a similar pledge was drawn up by the London Burgess Party, the Newcastle pledge was much more precisely formulated - the implication being that even at this early stage, the Newcastle radical party was no mere provincial satellite. Granted, its vision may have had a community based orientation, but that need not necessarily detract from what were still unusually progressive policies.²⁴

* Spence's idea that 'the land is the people's farm' was not an attack on property per se but an expression of his belief that land ownership was a perversion of natural justice; the source of all poverty and tyranny which threatened the peace and liberty of society.²⁵ Paine's 'Agrarian Justice', on the other hand, fell short of condemning land ownership. Instead he advocated the imposition of a system of groundrents, which would constitute a National Fund for meeting the special needs of those reaching the age of maturity (21yrs.) or retirement.²⁶ Spencean agrarian theory embraced the inherent social and political injustices of the system whereas Paine's

perspective appears to be locked into the economic issues. Spence wrote for a popular audience, publishing cheap tracts and broadsheets which would be more accessible to the poorer classes. The 'Rights of Man' which became a popular motto for radical banners is commonly attributed to Paine but Spence also used the phrase as a title for his Newcastle lecture.²⁷ Moreover, it is the influence of Spence's ideas that are most clearly detectable in the writings, speeches and policies of key local radicals. Cowen and other local radicals consistently campaigned for the abolition of the laws of primogeniture and entail which produced "an unnatural centralisation", arguing that the working classes are the producers of all wealth; that their labour is property and that the ills of society were not caused by overpopulation but by unjust distribution.²⁸ This line of argument closely resembles Spence's own conclusion to 'The Rights of Individuals' (1797):

Slaves and Unfortunate men have cultivated the earth, adorned it with buildings and filled it with all kinds of riches. And the wealth which enabled you to set these people to work was got by Hook or by Crook from Society. ...All riches come from Society, I mean the Labouring Part of it.²⁹

and is powerfully re-echoed by the Chartist, Robert Lowery, speaking at the re-launch of the Northern Political Union in 1838:

Did not Lord John Russell know that the right of the people to a maintenance from the soil was older and better than the right of his father to his lands? (Loud and repeated cheers) He knew it well - but what did he care whether the people were robbed of their inheritance and turned over to rot in a bastille, provided that the ill-gotten estates could be relieved from their charge. ..The improvements in society - the achievements in arms - the splendour that arose everywhere around them had all been produced by the people. 30

At this juncture, perhaps, we should not lose sight of the

symbolic significance of the Town Moor as the foremost radical meeting place. The success of the campaign to oppose enclosure of the Moor has already been noted. Radicals who gathered there in their thousands did not do so merely because it was conveniently situated and large enough to contain vast crowds; there are grounds for arguing that they also derived immense satisfaction from demanding their rights in that particular place. The importance of such symbolism can be all too easily overlooked, its nuances and subtleties unintelligible to the uninitiated, especially given that its impact invariably relies upon shared knowledge and experience. It is probably worth remembering, too, that nineteenth century literacy levels were considerably lower than they are today and, in the event, symbolic modes of communication would have been essential to any popular campaign.³¹ For instance, the carrying of large oak saplings by the Winlaton radicals in 1832 was obviously intended as a militant display of defiance and strength and, as such, was extremely effective.³² But equally, the powerful agrarian imagery the spectacle conveyed would also have been instantly recognised and understood by the crowd. The choice of oak was not arbitrary. The Winlatoners deliberately appealed to the Tyneside people on an emotional level by conjuring up images of Old England, of a timeless landscape where natural rights prevailed, unchallenged. In the same way, The Coronation Day gathering on the Town Moor in 1838 can be regarded as a unique gesture of contempt. The Northern Liberator advised its readers that 'This is the right way to spend Coronation Day, to battle for our rights leaving the 'useless and idle pageant' to be gazed at by aristocrats and fools'. And so whilst the 'unmeaning mummary' was going on a crowd of more than 80,000 gathered 'to assert the rights of human nature....banded together this day to worship at the altar of freedom'. Robert Lowery used the opportunity to good effect, reminding the crowd that

...the crown was held in trust for the people - that it was the property of the people, and could be resumed when the people were wronged...It was a principle that did not depend upon the decree of Lords or Commons, it emanated direct from the throne of the Almighty.³³

Even though the majority would have been unable to hear the speeches, they could still participate by marching behind a banner bearing their own eloquent message.³⁴ It is no accident either that among the banners that day there should be one with a few lines of Goldsmith's poem The Direful Effects of Luxury: 'Our fenceless fields the sons of wealth divide/ and even the bare-worn common is denied'. Goldsmith, like Burns, was popular with the local radicals, his poetry frequently quoted in the radical press, especially the Northern Liberator. In 1839, as on countless other occasions when a massive crowd assembled on the Moor 'like a goodly clustre of bees round the hive of liberty', they were in a very powerful sense 'occupying the ground'.³⁵ Whether those present would have recognised the reference to the 'Hive of Liberty' as the name of Spence's bookshop in Holborn would be difficult to prove. The coincidence is nevertheless intriguing.³⁶ Time and again, prominent radicals employed agrarian metaphors to reinforce their demand for a return to natural justice and a 'renewal' of the constitution. The people were referred to as including 'not only the owner of the soil, but the cultivator',³⁷ while the aristocracy were 'those who had fed and fattened upon public soil'.³⁸ And so, when Julian Harney addressed the 'brave men of the North' on Christmas Day, 1838, he began by reminding them that "They were met with their feet on God's own earth, with God's own sky for their canopy...would they take the oath - the oath to live free or die?"³⁹ His few phrases were something akin to a benediction; the campaign thus legitimized could be regarded as a moral

crusade and, like the crusades of old, physical force was accepted as an undesirable but unavoidable expedient.

* Some historians, notably T.J.Nossiter, have played down the revolutionary character of Newcastle Chartism, arguing that despite the vast quantities of pikes sold at regular Saturday markets, they posed little real threat to law and order. T.J.Nossiter's evidence seems to rest upon the placatory reports of Thomas Doubleday, and the Newcastle Courant's observation that local children had found a new role model for their games - playing at being Chartists!⁴⁰ Doubleday, as a committed radical would hardly have reported otherwise. As for the children, their games might reasonably be expected to reflect day to day experiences; any unusual occurrences, such as the Chartist confrontations in the Forth, would have been acted out. Far from proving that physical force Chartism was unlikely, the children's games suggest that the opposite was the case. And, the noticeable absence of any economic distress simply points up the stronger political motivation behind the local movement. The evidence may not be clearcut, but there is enough to suggest that the resort to force was more than just idle threats and hot air. Public speeches would have to have been toned down and those caught in possession of pikes were unlikely to admit that they had been procured for any sinister purpose. Nossiter dismisses the letters of old Chartists published in 1884 by Cowen's Weekly Chronicle as 'romantic journalism', arguing that contemporary accounts emphasised the moderation of local Chartism.⁴¹ On the other hand, these Chartist memoirs were written when all threat of prosecution had passed and, if there was no real possibility of public disorder, why did the authorities consider it necessary to swear in hundreds of special constables?

The various land schemes which proliferated during and after the Chartist years proved enormously attractive to Tyneside radicals and, although

ostensibly the motivation was to obtain voting rights at county elections, shareholders were justified in believing that they were reclaiming the land for the people. Unusually then, and despite its obvious agrarian appeal, the Anti-Corn Law League proved to be the source of sharp division and hostility. While local radicals universally condemned the Corn Law as a "virtual and practical revival of the serfage of the Middle Ages"⁴², they had little faith in the loyalties of the middle classes, fearing that "...as soon as they get the Corn Laws repealed they would turn their backs upon the people again".⁴³ Evidence such as this suggests that class antagonism lay at the very heart of local radicalism.⁴⁴ The popular perception was that the campaign was a middle class ploy to divert Chartist energies away from the fight for suffrage reform.⁴⁵ At a meeting to debate the issue Lowery argued that raising the price of bread

....springs from a Political Power for their own interest. This Land and the Aristocracy have got knit together so much that they study their own interest only, but the very persons who supported the Corn laws have found it out that they have been deceived by this middle class....has not the Working Men of England a right to go to the Root of the disease and carry universal suffrage?

The working man, he argued, would ultimately suffer if the Corn Laws were repealed before the Charter

...they (the Masters) have brought them down to the very lowest, to the starving point....they tell me the very weavers go clothed in Rags. There is thousands of acres of land that might be employed to advantage if we had a good government.⁴⁶

The uneasy and short lived alliance between the whigs and the radicals, which ended in bitter recriminations after the 1832 Reform Act, was unlikely to be resurrected other than on an ad hoc basis.⁴⁷ The main protagonists on both

sides continued to be politically active, and in a tightknit community such as Tyneside perceived betrayals were not easily forgotten, much less forgiven.⁴⁸ The League, in any case, was not even vaguely democratic.⁴⁹ Voting subscriptions were fixed at £50.- a sum easily affordable by Joseph Cowen Snr. for instance - but not necessarily by his tenants or his workforce. Nonetheless, radicals did borrow from its successful strategy of contesting local elections, and later repeal did provide a much needed incentive.⁵⁰

Of course, no survey of the land question would be complete without some consideration of O'Connor's Land Plan. As Dorothy Thompson has noted, both O'Connor and his Plan have had a singularly bad press.⁵¹ The limited perspective of some studies failed miserably to recognise the Plan for what it was: the progressive development of an established agrarian tradition, which itself underpinned and informed popular radicalism. In this context, the Plan can be regarded more as a unifying force than a 'bizarre gesture'.⁵² And it was not just Chartists and radicals who could unite under an agrarian banner, but also trade unionists. In view of the recently resurrected controversy surrounding the relationship between mining and Chartism, some comments might be considered apposite here. Roy Church plumps for the "minimal links" approach, arguing that the available evidence, however compelling, is equivocal.⁵³ In so far as his remarks relate to the country as a whole, few would quarrel with this position. There are, though, strong grounds for regarding North East miners as an exceptional case. The exhaustive local studies by Colls and Wilson are persuasively precise, and their claims are fully substantiated by the available evidence.⁵⁴ The "St. Lawrence Colliery" and "King Pitmen" banners flew alongside the Shoemakers' "Bundle of Sticks, Cap of Liberty" at the Town Moor meeting in May 1839.⁵⁵ And the upsurge in support is amply demonstrated by the way that Wallsend colliers 'laid in their colliery and came every man

to the demonstration, though an agitating meeting never had been held in the neighbourhood'.⁵⁶ There can be little doubt that the N.P.U. regarded the affiliation of local miners as crucial and reports of their weekly meetings are dominated by 'missions' to mining communities.⁵⁷ Church's criteria of experiential degradation and community solidarity are both met: first, by the declining conditions, and prices, and levels of safety in which miners worked, and the harsh evictions carried out whenever industrial protest threatened the coal owners profits; the second, by miners' active involvement in the whole range of radical organisations. And, given the sheer scale of mining accidents in the first half of the nineteenth century, it seems somewhat specious to cite the 'irrelevance to miners of the factory reform movement' by way of an explanation for their supposed limited involvement.⁵⁸ Any improvement in factory conditions was bound to have implications for miners whose claim for redress was, if anything, even more cogent. Equally, full participation in the Chartist Land Company need not necessarily be interpreted as evidence of the miners underlying conservatism, but rather as a demonstrable commitment to traditional local radicalism and its agrarian roots. The influence of trade union activists such as Martin Jude and Tommy Hepburn would have been significant. The Miners Association solicitor W.P Roberts was a close friend of O'Connor and an enthusiastic supporter of the Land Plan. In his election address in 1847, Roberts declared his unequivocal opposition to the laws of primogeniture and to a property based voting system. His expert defence of colliers and Chartists would have earned both their loyalty and respect.⁵⁹ And, if any further endorsement of the Plan was needed, T.S.Duncome's backing would have given it impressive credentials.⁶⁰ North East colliers received their radical education from the pages of the Miners Advocate and through the harsh realities of eviction.⁶¹ In the circumstances, O'Connor's Land Plan

would have appeared to offer a lifeline, a form of insurance.

Land schemes were not a short lived phenomenon. In 1849 the Newcastle Freehold Land Association attracted over 700 subscribers within two weeks of its inaugural meeting. Subscriptions were fixed at 3/- per fortnight to enable working men who were 'frugal and industrious' to work out their own freedom.⁶² Once again an opportunity occurred for collaboration between different radical groups. Local Chartists organised and addressed meetings while Temperance Associations provided suitable venues for the collection of regular payments.⁶³ Sir Joshua Walmsley M.P., speaking at a Parliamentary and Financial Reform Association meeting in Newcastle, called upon the working men to support the F.L.A.:

He called upon the mechanics who could afford it - and he was sorry so many could not afford it - to do what they could to get hold of the franchise by buying retail plots at wholesale prices and thus obtain a 40/- franchise for something like 20L.⁶⁴

Locally, then, the scheme seems to have been well received. Nationally, the response was rather mixed. Both Harney and W.J.Linton were 'vociferously opposed' to the F.L.A., though their antipathy doubtless had much to do with its links with the Parliamentary and Financial Reform Association.⁶⁵ Harney was deeply committed to Spence's agrarian ideas and, like Spence, he advocated a land nationalization scheme rather than the dubious transformation of working men into a class of shareholders.⁶⁶

The object of Cobden with his freehold land scheme, and Walmsley with his 'little charter' is, clearly, to so far extend the suffrage as to swamp the house with representatives of the 'Manchester School'. In short, the policy of both is to make use of the proletarians to establish bourgeois supremacy....The proletarians need another sort of reform. the feudal aristocracy being doomed to expire, care should be taken that no new aristocracy be

allowed to take their place. With that view the land must be made national property.⁶

By the same token, Linton's determination to make land nationalization a crucial plank of the land and Labour League programme demonstrates that he wholeheartedly endorsed Harney's stance.⁶⁸ This was particularly significant because Harney had long standing ties with the Tyneside radicals and both men became close friends and supporters of Joseph Cowen.

The land question persistently dominated radical writings. 'Terrig-eneous', an aptly named but unidentified writer contributed many articles to Harney's Democratic Review. Addressed to 'Brother Owners of the Soil', he set out to demonstrate that the land was a God given inheritance to all mankind, quoting extensively from Genesis to substantiate his claims.⁶⁹ Harney's willingness to devote space to agrarian issues on a regular basis is evidence that he regarded land reform as a priority and not a peripheral issue. With his call for 'the Charter and Something More', Harney advocated all true democrats to demand: 'The Charter, The Land and the organisation of labour'.⁷⁰ The few lines of Southey's verse printed on the first page of the Red Republican eloquently convey the essence of Harney's revolutionary stance -

If it be guilt -
To preach what you are pleased to call strange notions;
That all mankind as brethren must be equal;
That privileged orders of society
Are evil and oppressive; that the right
Of property is a juggle to deceive
The Poor whom you oppress; - I plead me guilty.⁷¹

- and encapsulates the meaning of radicalism: a belief in equality, international brotherhood and natural justice.

The suggestion has been made that the land question became a point

of contact with the Liberals, facilitating both a radicalisation of the Liberal Party and a liberalisation of the radical movement.⁷² Given the centrality of agrarianism in radical ideology, one thing is certain. Without a demonstrable commitment to land reform, the Liberal Party would not have successfully secured radical allegiances. It can also be argued that agrarianism fed directly into republicanism which, while it had always been a vital element of radical debate, obtained a much higher profile after 1848. As the evidence shows, justification for land reforms rested firmly on moral grounds. Ideas of international brotherhood, which were such a significant force in Tyneside political life, must be regarded as an extension of this very same rationale. Local radicals recognised that universality was an essential component of natural justice. Thus, while their primary impulse was to fight for their own political and social freedom, they automatically identified with the struggles of other oppressed peoples. Time and again, glasses were raised to toast the 'glorious French Revolution' and to commemorate the Polish Revolution of 1830.⁷³ A radical assembly in 1838 concluded their proceedings with three resounding cheers for the Northern Liberator, universal suffrage and the National Guards of France; the 'Cap of Liberty' which adorned countless banners was a striking symbol of this same solidarity;⁷⁴ and in 1854, when the Italian cause was not considered remotely 'fashionable', a penny subscription from the Tyneside community rather than the doles of an elite paid for a presentation to Garibaldi in memory of his visit to Tyneside.⁷⁵

The contention here is that the internationalist ideas that informed Tyneside radicalism accounts for its unusual resilience and longevity. In the main, other radical regions appear to have had a somewhat limited perspective, their vision was comparatively more parochial and, as a consequence, the development of a national movement was seriously handicapped.⁷⁶ Naturally,

this raises a number of complex questions, most of which hinge upon explaining why local radicalism should be so fundamentally different from that which obtained elsewhere. Clearly, the answer cannot be located in any lack of community sentiment for, if anything, the opposite was the case. In political terms, endemic local loyalties invariably outweighed national considerations. And, in those circumstances, the influence of local activists must be considered the crucial factor. For instance, Augustus Beaumont, editor of the Northern Liberator had fought with the National Guards in Paris in 1830.⁷⁷ As the elected member for Kingston, Jamaica, he had campaigned assiduously for the abolition of slavery, and as the proprietor of the 'best selling journal on Tyneside' he repeatedly called for 'an end to Irish oppression and colonial tyranny'.⁷⁸ Beaumont's influence was not diminished by his premature death. In the minds of the faithful, he had become a martyr to the cause; one who

...sacrificed his health, and ultimately his life, to his principles..
...How can we honour the illustrious dead? By what means can we
prove ourselves worthy of his labours? By diligently following the
course which he has pointed out to us - by redoubling our exertions
in the practice of those principles which he inculcated. ...Our
cause is a holy one - 'tis the cause of virtue, of reason
'tis the cause of the millions of suffering humanity⁷⁹

Men like Beaumont, Harney and Joseph Cowen helped to disseminate the belief that the future emancipation of mankind was intrinsically linked; that the cause of liberty had to be fought by all men, acting together. And, if international solidarity assumed a greater priority than national unity, perhaps it was because the stalwarts of physical force Chartism needed a level of participation unavailable to them at home.

If the fight for reform was one side of the coin, the fight against tyranny was the other. In 1840, Russia became the tyrant par excellence

and the focus of radical energies. After all, in a climate where expressions of fraternal solidarity were a commonplace, Tyneside was the perfect breeding ground for David Urquhart's Russophobia to take root. Charles Attwood, founder member of the Northern Political Union, was the acknowledged leader of the Tyneside radicals and an early convert to Urquhart's foreign policy.⁸⁰ His radicalism was markedly different from the moderate Tory reformism of his brother Thomas. Although there was a certain amount of collaboration between the Birmingham Political Union and the N.P.U., Charles does not appear to have shared his brother's obsession with currency reforms.⁸¹ Under his guidance the local movement articulated a political critique which embraced international as well as national reforms. A brief alliance was achieved between the local radicals and the Whigs and in 1830 both groups met at the Turks Head to affirm 'the sympathy of Englishmen with the cause of liberty in France'.⁸² Tyneside had a large Irish immigrant population. Irish affairs were consequently a notable concern of the N.P.U., who sent an Address to the people of Ireland, inviting them to join the campaign:

...Will Irishmen continue slaves?...or will they join heart and hand with their brothers of England, of Scotland,- aye and of France - and swear by the spirit of their fathers that slavery shall exist no longer?⁸³

The sanction of leading activists such as Thomas Doubleday, Robert Lowery, John Mason and Attwood persuaded many would be sceptics that Urquhart's analysis was sound. A number of historians have suggested that local enthusiasm arose from a form of economic protectionism; that traders, merchants and bankers feared the loss of established trading links.⁸⁴ This argument, although not wholly convincing, deserves some consideration. J.H.Gleason claims that Urquhart had most success in Newcastle and Glasgow,

and since both were important commercial centres, it followed that 'economic forces exerted an important if incalculable influence upon the growth of hostile sentiment'.⁸⁵ There seems to be some dispute, however, as to what extent the Glasgow Chartists succumbed to Urquhart's monomania. Alexander Wilson, in his seminal study of Scottish Chartism, states that while some aspects of the campaign proved attractive to the local radicals, their response was not generally enthusiastic and 'the purity of Glasgow Chartism was preserved'.⁸⁶ Wilson's choice of words suggests a certain determination to protect the reputation of Glasgow but R.G. Gammage tends to agree, claiming that 'Newcastle almost alone paid any particular attention to the subject'.⁸⁷ Until such ambiguities are resolved, perhaps by some further local studies, the question of economic determination must remain open. In any event, the economic argument must be, at best, only a partial explanation, for it would be difficult to accept that men willing to risk unemployment, jail or even transportation to fight for the Charter could be seriously deflected from their purpose by economic concerns alone. A more plausible explanation is that many would have relished the opportunity to lend support to a campaign which was so blatantly Anti-Palmerstonian, and which also, in their view at least, encompassed the clear principle of defending oppressed people. When anti-Russian feelings resurfaced at the time of the Crimea War, a speech by Cowen reasserted the moral imperative for defending Turkey: "What was the right course or one man was right for the nation...we should defend Turkey against the unprovoked attack by Russia even if it would damage trade and commerce".⁸⁸ Notwithstanding these arguments, the importance of Urquhart's campaign on Tyneside lies in the way it meshed with the established international tone of local radicalism and the rising tide of Pro-Polish sentiment. In the early 1850's the Polish and Hungarian Refugee Committee was able to tap into this reservoir of sympathy

and elicit popular support for the Polish exiles.⁸⁹

XThe preoccupation with foreign affairs may be said to have served a dual purpose. In the first place, anti-Russian sentiment aroused latent but passionate patriotic emotions which forged a bond of unity between the middle and the working classes at a time when attempted alliances over domestic issues had proved largely unsuccessful. More importantly still, the experience of Liberals and radicals working together had special ramifications in the sphere of domestic politics, especially at mid century when Liberalism was in a state of flux. The Liberals came to recognise and respect the radicals' remarkable grasp of foreign affairs, and the possibility of their working cooperatively became not just feasible but desirable.⁹⁰ The Paris Peace Congress (1849) provided an ideal opportunity for both political groups to explore their mutual interests and begin to make tentative gestures towards establishing a rudimentary working partnership.⁹¹ A large local delegation attended the Congress, including George Charlton, J.A.Cockburn, Robert Lowery and Joseph Cowen Snr.⁹² However, the conference decision to implement a policy of non-interventionism in the domestic affairs of Italy and Hungary provoked controversy, and infuriated Ultra-radicals such as Linton. He was frankly dismayed that prominent Chartists should associate themselves with it.⁹³ Henry Vincent, for instance, was a founder member of the People's International League which purported to promote the cause of freedom and self government, and had close links with the Italian movement.⁹⁴ Linton's antipathy to the policy is caustically expressed in his illustrated alphabet:

M is the Middle Class Movement, sir! Its quite a new invention.
You see its impossible to leap without due circumspection
Its borrow'd from that diplomatic dodge - non-intervention
Which means to let the devil work, and help him with intention.⁹⁵

Harney's Democratic Review carried an equally scathing attack by 'One of the Men of the Future', who claimed that the Paris Congress was 'a solemn farce'

...there is an intestine war raging at this moment in every civilised community, and that under the appearance of peace, the rich oppressor and the poor oppressed are at daggers drawn....in the face of these undeniable facts, how futile the proceedings of this Congress appear. How many of the veritable sons of labour graced that assemblage by their presence? Look over the list. You will find manufacturers, lawyers, parsons, bankers, adventurers and speculators of all grades and names who, like the voluptuous aristocracy of Vienna desire peace that they may enjoy themselves in safety.⁹⁶

It would appear that despite significant advances being made towards the establishment of more conciliatory and harmonious class relations, there were contradictory forces at work.⁹⁷ A small but influential group of Ultra-radicals remained deeply sceptical of these amicable overtures and, in the case of Harney and Linton, diametrically opposed to any placatory gestures. Harney anticipated renewed class conflict, not harmony⁹⁸ and he pressed on with initiatives to unite the working classes of all countries.⁹⁹ The pages of the Northern Star were regularly given over to the discussion of European nationalist issues in a bid to improve working class knowledge of foreign affairs.¹⁰⁰ Inevitably this brought him into conflict with O'Connor who wanted domestic matters to have precedence.¹⁰¹

The importance of Harney's influence on Tyneside has already been noted. He could draw upon established and generational loyalties through his long association with the Winlaton W.M.A. and the N.P.U. It is, then, hardly surprising that his style of aggressive radicalism should carry substantial weight with local radicals, especially in view of his deepening friendship with Joseph Cowen. Both were close friends of Mazzini, and their close

collaboration in promoting Polish and Hungarian liberation as members of various national and local societies gave them frequent opportunities to exchange ideas. Access to a national network, largely effected through Cowen's contacts with an identifiable radical elite, was crucial to the continuing progress of Tyneside radicalism. That being said, it is important to note Cowen was not Harney's protege, as some commentators suggest.¹⁰² Nor was Harney able to dictate the policy of the Tyneside radicals through his friendship with Cowen, even though Schoyen creates the misguided impression that he was the controlling force behind the Newcastle Foreign Affairs Committee.¹⁰³ Cowen was far too shrewd to be manipulated by anyone else, and his tight financial control of the Committee ensured that he remained, as he intended, both policy maker and power broker.

Harney and local radicals such as Josiah Thomas, William Hunter, James Watson and John Kane provided the vital strand of continuity so essential to link the early and late radical movements. Fig.1, which traces the activities of some 26 prominent Chartists, demonstrates the extent to which radicalism retained its grip in the locality, and the way that foreign affairs provided a special focus for radical energies at mid century. When the complete membership of the Foreign Affairs Committee is scrutinized (see Fig.2) almost fifty per cent can be identified as former Chartists. Given that a reasonable proportion would have been lost to the cause through old age, death or emigration, the picture which emerges is one of quite remarkable resilience - and one which suggests that the language of radicalism was far from bankrupt on Tyneside. The claim advanced here is that there was a detectable radical network of core activists, who moved between the various disparate groups acting as communicators, propagandists and coordinators. A more detailed study of this network will be offered in Chapter 3. For the present, it might be sufficient

CHARTIST	NPU	FAC	URQ	REF	NRU
Charles Attwood	*	*	*		
John Blakey	*		*		
William Cook	*	*			*
John Cockburn	*	*			
George Crawshay		*	*	*	
John K.Crothers		*			
Ralph Currie	*				*
James Charlton		*			
Thomas Doubleday	*		*		*
James T.Gilmour	*	*	*	*	*
Thomas Gregson		*	*		*
Alexander Gunn				*	
George J.Harney		*		*	*
William Hunter		*			*
Thomas Horn	*		*		
Martin Jude		*	*		*
William Jordan		*	*		
John Kane		*	*	*	*
Thomas Lishman			*		*
Peter Murray		*	*		
Angus McLeod		*			
Robert Peddie		*			
John Richardson		*			
Jonathan Rayne		*			
Josiah Thomas		*	*	*	*
James Watson		*	*	*	*

KEY:

NPU Northern Political Union

FAC Newcastle Foreign Affairs Committee

URQ Supporter of David Urquhart

REF Polish and Hungarian Refugee Committee

NRU Northern Reform Union

NEWCASTLE UPON TYNE FOREIGN AFFAIRS COMMITTEE

Charles Attwood*	William Jordan*
John Allison	John Kane*
Peter Anderson *	Peter Murray*
Joseph Barlow	Joseph Mills
James Brown	Angus McLeod*
William Cook*	Richard Nelson
John Cockburn*	J.Paley
George Crawshay*	Robert Peddie*
John K.Crothers*	John Richardson*
Robert Catcheside	Richard B.Reed
T.N.Catherall	Jonathan Rayne*
Robert Charlton	John Ritchie
James Charlton*	John Reid
John Fife	John Rea
John Forster	John A.Southeron
John Galloway	Joseph Southeron
James T.Gilmour*	Dr.Skelton
Thomas Gregson*	Josiah Thomas*
James Grieves	Arthur Trevelyan
George J.Harney*	John Wake
Thomas Herdman	James Watson*
William Hunter*	William Watson
Martin Jude*	Ralph Walters

* denotes Chartist

to note that members of the core were prominent in trade unions and friendly societies; executive members of Temperance organisations and mechanics institutes; and, after 1859, when Cowen introduced Cooperation into the region with the opening of the Blaydon store¹⁰⁴, a large percentage were also committed cooperators.

1848 was a vulnerable period for radicalism, on Tyneside as well as elsewhere, and despite the enthusiastic efforts of local activists, the movement noticeably lacked an effective leadership. Chartist meetings were reportedly 'thinly attended'.¹⁰⁵ The Gateshead Observer, eager to promote the formation of the Newcastle and Gateshead Reform Association, used the opportunity to assert that local Chartists had little local influence and no real power:

We are aware that the Chartist, as distinct from the Liberals and Reformers, are an unimportant body in Newcastle. Great in noise but few in number - violent in print but weak in purpose and power - their insignificance might excuse us from all notice of their proceedings; but gladly recognising in their councils, with all their error and follies, a visible amendment as compared with their former career, and sharing in their principles, while we repudiate the spirit in which they are advocated, we are not disposed to reason with them, and remonstrate with them, and convince them, if we can, of the injustice of their reckless assertions and imputations.

It was into this more conciliatory political climate that Cowen first began to make an impact. Cowen, it must be remembered, was not directly involved in local Chartism and although he always avowed himself a Chartist it is not altogether clear whether he actually participated in the Edinburgh movement. The tone of his early speeches was markedly conciliatory and optimistic, and appears to be more in keeping with the moderate, even handed Chartism of Edinburgh than the aggressive style associated with the local movement.

Cowen's student notebook, for instance, contained the following observation about the middle classes:

They are elevated so much in life to reason and reflect but low enough to keep clear of the moral contagion of a court. The uninformed mob may swell a Nation's bulk; and the titled tinsel courtly throng may be its feathered ornament but it is the middle class the nation has to look both for the hand of support and the eye of intelligence, these are a nation's strength.¹⁰⁷

The Sanitary Association and the Winlaton Literary and Scientific Society which he established on his return from university in 1847, demonstrated a clear concern to draw the whole community together and his own determination to act as principle mediator between the middle and working classes. His Temperance activities stemmed from a similar impulse,¹⁰⁸ and a speech at a large public meeting of the Parliamentary and Financial Reform Association powerfully conveys his own optimism. Calling upon the 'Middle and Productive classes' to support the Association, he expressed regret that the motion had not been presented by a working man:

He was not one himself, though he certainly worked both with his hand and with his head. He, however, did not belong to that class, though he would endeavour to be their exponent that evening. He must avow himself a Chartist. He knew that the Chartists had committed excesses but that did not affect the justice of their claim. He was for universal suffrage and he accepted the proposed measure as he would accept 7/6d in the £, when he could get nothing else. He thought the words humbug and whig were synonymous terms. The whig preached reform without performing it. He called that hypocrisy. It was worse than inconsistency. He called upon every sincere reformer to stand forward and work with the certainty that they would ultimately triumph. In all their efforts they must evince a sympathy with the people. He had found good and noble minds amongst the people. Some people thought because the people had dirty hands they had dirty minds. That was not only an error but a lie. (hear, hear, and applause).... He did not put much faith in political revolutions. They might have a good pick axe but it would be of no benefit if they did not use it. The good institutions

which were now in operation were not worked with half the energy they ought to be....A virtuous and intelligent population never would be slaves. Reformers should have clean hands. The man that stole a penny could not with any grace reprove a man for stealing a pound; and the Chartists might thank their own inconsistencies for having struggled for so many years in vain.¹⁰⁹

In the course of the next decade or so, Cowen made a number of attempts to elicit the support of the middle classes, but his efforts meet with only limited success. By the early 1850's, his views show signs of a significant shift, as this letter defending the use of physical force clearly demonstrates:

There are some people so dead to all sense of honour, of righteousness and of truth that the only way of reaching their consciences is through their hides or their stomachs. They can only be thrashed or starved into subjection.¹¹⁰

The reason for such a dramatic volte-face may be said to be two-fold. Firstly, there are grounds for deducing that the profound class antagonisms which permeated Tyneside radicalism proved enormously persuasive to Cowen, who was quite determined to take a leading role in the local movement. His influence upon the policies and aims of the Tyneside radicals exceeded that of all previous leaders, to the extent that the local movement took on a distinctive 'Cowenite' style, but the influences at work were reciprocal. An interesting parallel is that of Lowery's altered attitude following his departure to Edinburgh in 1840.¹¹¹ Moreover, Cowen's earlier moderate optimism was even further eroded by his involvement in the Italian and Polish liberation movements. Personal contact with a great many exiled revolutionaries led him to identify with their causes and to conclude that "...peace cannot be attained before justice, and justice cannot be wrung from the European despots save by arms".¹¹²

The international dimension of Tyneside radicalism may not have been engendered by Cowen but his enthusiasm for foreign affairs certainly ensured that it retained a high profile on the radical agenda in the ensuing decades. Cowen was no mere passive observer, but an active participant; a revolutionary in the cause of Italian and Polish liberation who readily supplied money, seditious literature, arms and even asylum when needed. Cowen was already involved in the Italian cause before his return to Tyneside and through Mazzini he was brought into contact with other like-minded activists, particularly those who were members of the Peoples International League. Linton, who was the League's secretary, hoped it would be "a successful association of the best minds in the country" and actively solicited Cowen's support.¹¹³ The League stressed international responsibilities, the folly and immorality of an isolative foreign policy and prioritized in favour of educating the public:

Though many, the nations of Europe are one and all members one of another. In the well-being of each all are interested, for all share consciously or unconsciously in the mixed good and evil which affects each...Englishmen should be cognisant of the processes through which the progressive destinies of Europe are being worked out, so that whenever European affairs may call for interference, they may be in no doubt as to the course to be pursued.¹¹⁴

The League's programme was expected to benefit oppressed nations and to "infuse new strength, morality and prosperity into England's social life".¹¹⁵ An Address wrtten by Mazzini outlining the League's proposals obtained an enormous circulation, both at home and abroad. F.B.Smith has attached great significance to its availability in the period immediately preceeding the 1848 revolutions.¹¹⁶

Cowen collaborated with Linton on a number of projects, mostly

aimed at furthering the Italian cause, and he became the chief sponsor of Linton's ambitious publication The English Republic.¹¹⁷ Cowen was fully alive to the potential power of the press and he sought to exploit this medium to the full. He assiduously canvassed sympathetic provincial newspaper proprietors, impressing upon them the importance of publicizing radical issues. In addition, he financially supported Ultra-radical publications such as the Democratic Review and The Red Republican in a bid to ensure their continued circulation. He himself published two periodicals, The Northern Tribune and The Republican Record, before finally purchasing the Newcastle Chronicle in 1859. Even before that date, the Chronicle was effectively promoting Cowenite views for he had already negotiated partial control over its contents in return for financial assistance.¹¹⁸ In 1852, when Cowen and Linton decided to launch the 'Friends of European Freedom' subscription, copies of the circular address were distributed to every liberal newspaper in the U.K. and Ireland.¹¹⁹ Subscriptions were fixed at 1/- per head and the funds were to be used by Mazzini and Louis Kossuth "in whatever manner it may seem good". But, despite Cowen's desire to "disprove the imputation that we are but a set of selfish traders with no abiding reverence for the heroic and true", the campaign was not a success and at the end of twelve months intensive fund raising a mere £57:7:6d had been raised.¹²⁰ The probability that the fund would be used for the purchase of arms appears to have deterred a good many potential contributors.

Linton supplied the engravings for the Northern Tribune and a number of eminent radicals, including Thomas Cooper, Kossuth and Mazzini contributed articles. The Northern Tribune was widely condemned for its extreme republicanism but Cowen refused to modify either tone or contents to increase its profitability. He remained

...resolved to pursue unaltered the course we have marked out for ourselves. We write neither for pay nor pastime and to forego one principle of our democratic creed would be to play traitor to our conscience.¹²¹

In March 1855 Cowen sold The Tribune to Holyoake, who incorporated it into his own anti-clerical publication, The Reasoner.¹²² Cowen was firmly convinced of the educational and propagandist advantages of the radical press and he continued to publicize republican ideas through the pages of The Republican Record, the organ of the Republican Brotherhood. The stated aims of the Brotherhood were much more progressive than those of its parent body, the Foreign Affairs Committee. The latter was believed to be best suited "to undertake the mission of the present, ours (i.e. The Rep. Brotherhood) is rather the mission of the future". Their aim was not just to circulate information about foreign affairs but to set in motion "a thorough reconstruction of society".¹²³ Universal suffrage remained an absolute priority but the Brotherhood's ultimate purpose extended far beyond any individual parliamentary reform:

The members of the Republican Brotherhood will seek, by instructional means, to indoctrinate their fellow countrymen with republican principles, leaving to the national will of the future to determine the means of reforming or changing the institutions of the country.¹²⁴

The influence of both Harney and Linton is clearly detectable in the Brotherhood's slogan: 'the government of the people, by, and for, the people'.¹²⁵

Cowen drew foreign nationals and eminent radicals like a magnet and thus Newcastle became the focus of radical energies. Kossuth, Louis Worcell, Orsini, Lewkawski, Harney and Holyoake all regularly enjoyed the hospitality of Stella Hall and gave generously of their time in return,

speaking at mechanics' institutes, making speeches at soirees and dinners, and writing provocative and illuminating articles for his many radical publications. As for the people of Newcastle, they became more and more drawn into foreign issues, understanding and sympathizing with the exiles to such an extent that the customary divide between foreign and domestic politics became more blurred. Separate branches of the radical movement combined forces to assist the twelve Hungarian and Polish refugees who arrived in Newcastle in 1851.¹²⁶ At a meeting in the Lecture Hall, Cowen introduced them to his "fellow friends of freedom and humanity" as steady, sober, industrious, intelligent and virtuous and reminded his audience of their undoubted heroism: "They were merely doing for their country what our own Cromwell and his colleagues did for England".¹²⁷ The emphasis upon sobriety was, of course, essential if Cowen was to recruit the assistance of the influential Methodist and Temperance lobby. The final debts of the Committee were, as ever, cleared by Cowen who was both secretary and treasurer but despite his dismay at so much "lip patriotism", and the general lack of gratitude for his efforts, he maintained that "The calm approbation of a pure conscience is a higher and better reward than the plaudits of a noisy public".¹²⁸

His efforts to promote the rectitude of the Italian cause proved to be rather more successful. And of all the foreign nationals to visit Newcastle, Garibaldi was the one who captured the imagination and the heart of the local people. In April 1854, he spent some three weeks on Tyneside and during his visit he and Cowen were constant companions. He stayed at Stella Hall and, at Cowen's request, he visited and gave a talk to the Winlaton Mechanics' Institute. Although Garibaldi was anxious to avoid publicity, the Friends of European Freedom organised by Cowen raised a penny subscription and presented Garibaldi with a handsome gold and steel sword, and an engraved

telescope.¹²⁹ Cowen did not meet Garibaldi again until 1864 but they remained in close contact, especially during the Sicilian War when both money and arms were sent by Cowen to assist the campaign. After the Battle of Milaggio, Garibaldi wrote to Cowen to convey his heartfelt gratitude: "I thank you for what you tell me about the Whitworth guns and for whatever you can do for us in that way"¹³⁰

The groundswell of interest in foreign affairs was most sharply focused in 1854 when events in the Crimea became a source of local as well as national concern, precipitating the regeneration of the Foreign Affairs Committee. In August some 180 petitioners called upon the mayor to convene a public meeting to consider the progress of the War.¹³¹ Although Urquhart was undoubtedly responsible for the establishment of Foreign Affairs Committees in a number of cities and towns, he did not visit Tyneside until October and, by then, the organisation of the Foreign Affairs Committee was well in hand.¹³² Charles Attwood reappeared in radical circles, writing to Cowen in December of the urgent need for action:

We must work. Newcastle is now the very anchor of the nation's safety. If it be saved at all, it will be through her determined and continued energy. If it be lost, it will be through her not being got sufficiently excited to her own grand office of protecting it.¹³³

Attwood's pride in the Newcastle radical movement is evident. His fears that the radicals would be unresponsive proved entirely misfounded. The Foreign Affairs Committee had already swung into action, holding a large demonstration on November 29th, the anniversary of the Polish revolution. Attwood was elected President of the Committee, with Cowen acting as Secretary.¹³⁴ Although many former Chartists and radicals responded to Urquhart's anti-Russian

appeal, the vast majority did not subscribe to his political views. Urquhart was popularly believed to be the arch-conspirator who had betrayed the Welsh uprising, though this was never proven.¹³⁵ He was an outspoken Tory who, by his own admission, had "no time for popular uprisings", and in any event his outspoken criticism of Kossuth and Mazzini would hardly have endeared him to Cowen. The blatant republicanism that informed the Newcastle Committee agenda was completely at odds with Urquhartite foreign diplomacy that almost invariably dictated the aims and activities of Committees elsewhere. In March 1855, dissension between a handful of Urquhart's supporters and the rest of the Committee resulted in the establishment of a rival group, led by George Crawshay.¹³⁶ Anxious to distance himself from Urquhart's views, Cowen published the following statement in the Northern Tribune:

The reader will by this time understand that we cannot count ourselves as enrolled in the ranks of the faithful, although on many points we accord with Mr. Urquhart's opinions, appreciate his patriotism and admire his talents.¹³⁷

Perhaps the key to their strange relationship lies in a speech Cowen gave in December 1853. Whenever the honour and independence of the nation was threatened, he said, he would "bury all party war cries, all party badges and rally to one common watchword".¹³⁸ Patriotism, it seems, was the principal factor; "the string that bound them together".¹³⁹

The question of suffrage reform had not been lost sight of during those years but remained an integral part of the radical programme. A public meeting of the Foreign Affairs Committee in 1855 resolved therefore to demand the restoration of Poland, major reforms of the army and a reform of parliament including universal manhood suffrage. The Committee further called for all democratic associations to act together.¹⁴⁰ An attempt to put aside the call

for universal suffrage because it was "ill-timed and impolitic" was promptly overruled.¹⁴¹ In 1857 reform was once more top of the radical agenda, on the grounds that "If ever it was important to enfranchise the whole of the people it was when that people were called upon to take arms and to bear the burden of a great war, waged in the name of liberty abroad".¹⁴²

The Northern Reform Union was formed following a massive public meeting on the 27th December 1857, and local Liberal M.P.s were canvassed at an early stage to provide support and exert parliamentary pressure. Initially none would declare in favour of manhood suffrage, but six out of seven agreed to support the secret ballot and the abolition of the property qualification. The N.R.U. rapidly established itself as a powerful local force with a membership of 481 in the first three months.¹⁴³ Cowen travelled throughout the North East, addressing meetings almost every night and 2,000 copies of an address setting out the Union's aims were printed and circulated. Rapid regeneration of the suffrage campaign proved remarkably easy, thanks mainly to Cowen's expert coordination of the Union's activities, and the fact that the core network of radicals were still active in the sphere of foreign affairs. It is worth noting, too, that those early meetings were held in the Chartist Hall with the blessing of the Chartist Committee until larger premises could be found. The N.R.U. Council was comprised of former Chartists and N.P.U. members, trade unionists (especially from the mining villages) and new recruits to the radical cause. It is a pity that insufficient evidence prevents a survey of the occupational spread of members but the few membership lists which have survived suggest that skilled workers were the most active. (see Fig.3)

Cowen continued to solicit middle class support. In an open letter which spoke of the "unhappy political differences" between them, he invited

NORTHERN REFORM UNION

South Shields Branch:

(Members listed by occupation as at 8.3.1858.)

Tailor
 Trimmer
 Shipwright
 Moulder
 Blacksmith (3)
 Builder
 Hosier
 Publican
 Billsticker
 Plumber
 Joiner
 Draper

Hartlepool Branch:

(Executive, as at 30.10.1858)

Jabez Bridges	Joiner
J.Claugh	Coaltrimmer
J.Callendar	Fitter
J.Caldwell	Brass Finisher
C.Hill	Draper
John Hindmarsh	Foreman Tailor
W.Hull	Spirit Merchant
C.Moore	Surgeon
B.Ord	Proprietor of the Free Press
R.Pearson	Stationer
J.Smith	Shopkeeper
- -	Foreman Ropemaker

Stockton Branch:

(members list, as at 12.2.1859)

- Alderson	Clerk
J.Allison	Corndealet
- Bell	Publican
J.A.Benson	Merchant
- Braithwaite	Wholesale Grocer
- Browen	Millwright
J.Byers	Leadworker
G.Dodds	Solicitor
- Falcus	Merchant
- Fletcher	Plasterer
W.J.Fenney	Hairdresser
- Hinde	Skinner
S.Ingleden	Wharfinger
- Jordisan	Wholesale Grocer
W.Longstaff	Bootmaker
W.Pybus	Corndealet
- Richardson	Surgeon
R.Sewell	Blacking Manufacturer
W.Skinner	Banker
- Taylorson	Wholesale Cabinet Maker
- Tweedy	Fruit Merchant
- Weatherhead	Shopkeeper
- Wilson	Bookseller

them to join the Union and promised to seek an acceptable compromise "except on matters of principle".¹⁴⁴ He also wrote to The Nonconformist, complaining of their "decline in political faith and failure to support the union of middle and working classes in reform".¹⁴⁵ The support of the dissenting middle classes was perceived to be crucial but, despite all the urgent lobbying, Cowen was forced to admit that the middle class voters had "turned a deaf ear to the cry for enfranchisement".¹⁴⁶ In a circular issued jointly by Cowen and Richard Reed (Secretary) to the 'Radical Reformers of the United Kingdom', they blamed the political slough on the "selfishness" of the middle classes:

Let them know that the means you used to help them to gain their own political rights, you will use against them to win your own. Those who are not for you are against you.¹⁴⁷

Cowen was by now identifying himself more and more with the working classes. A familiar local figure, in 'rusty black slop clothes and a soft billycock hat' he appealed to the working classes as one of themselves; as one who sympathised with their views, who would champion their interests and rigorously defend their rights.¹⁴⁸ When the Union was refused the use of the Town Hall to hold a public meeting Cowen promptly dismissed the imputation that the working classes could not conduct themselves properly:

Dirty! It was made to be dirtied. Working men agitated their political rights with becoming modesty, and with reason and gentlemanly decorum. It was not a question of whether the Reform Union was to have a meeting in that gilded chamber, but whether the people of Newcastle were to use their own room for their own purposes.¹⁴⁹

The clamour for reform was still being made on the traditional grounds of natural right, but those rights were now being linked to the 'fitness' of the

working classes: "...the fitness of the mass of our working men to those rights which belong to them by nature and which no government ever gave or could take away."¹⁵⁰ As Holyoake enthused in an article for the Daily Chronicle:

The Northern Reform Union does not go like O'Connor for an irish-brained, fustian-jacketed, stubble-chinned, antagonistic suffrage; but for an English moulded, clear-headed, clean faced, decently attired, self defensive franchise.¹⁵¹

Holyoake, it seems, became so carried away by his own rhetoric that he completely lost sight of the Union's objective to demand **universal** suffrage.

Greater efforts were made to recruit the working classes. From Berwick, Robert Mathison wrote to say that their committee was to be an "equal proportion of workies and shoppies".¹⁵² He also requested some cheap tracts since his members were too poor to afford to buy the Union's journal, The Record, insisting that this "would make the cause march forward".¹⁵³ The Ayr branch, too, was said to be entirely working class. As the branch secretary explained, Ayr was "too aristocratic a place" and "...All Working men feel indignatite at the unseemly INSULT offered to them by the Tory candidate-Sir James Ferguson- in describeing them as unimproveing and irresponsible."¹⁵⁴ Closer to home though, a Newcastle member pointed out that "little has been done among the collier population; and every intelligent pitman is a Radical, both from education and conviction".¹⁵⁵ In the event, the colliery villages were successfully canvassed for support and became the backbone of the movement. Gradually the working classes began to rally to the fight as this offer of assistance shows:

I say sir that it is the duty of every Working Man to rally round you....there may be many things that i could do for you Either in the Shape of Collecting Name Livering tracts gathering subscriptions

Livering notices of any king Anything i am willing to Do Either in one capisity ore anothe that i can do is am Ready anytime.¹⁵⁶

The N.R.U. has not always received the recognition it deserves. It has all too often been dismissed as a short lived phenomenon or as a "dismal failure".¹⁵⁷ Such views fail to take account of the way the N.R.U. sustained the demand for reform and provided a foundation upon which the Northern Reform League was later able to build. At the beginning of 1858 Newcastle seemed almost alone in agitating for reform. Other localities such as Birmingham, Norwich and Sunderland, were judged to be 'dull' and 'deficient in public spirit'.¹⁵⁸ Doubleday commented that

...they are looking to the North for a movement and to Newcastle especially, Lord Derby's bill not giving anything to the working man, the fustian jacket being really the bugbear of the aristocracyWe shall have the Whigs bidding against the Tories on this occasion but both require to be spurned by the popular voice.¹⁵⁹

Holyoake's assistance was enlisted to publicize the Union's activities in London. Writing to request Reed's help to "stir up the cockneys", Holyoake promised that if his editor would not comply he would "...throw Orsini's shells into the offices and simultaneously with a smashing of all the editors I shall organise an explosion of Gas below and blow up the entire office".¹⁶⁰ Towns such as Berwick, Sheffield, Bradford and Birmingham all looked to Newcastle to supply the lead for "if only they gave these places a little help, they should put the whole country in agitation". By the end of the year the N.R.U. was being dubbed the 'Aurora Borealis of Reform'.¹⁶¹

The Union's strategy was strictly constitutional; they lobbied M.P.s, submitted letters and articles on reform to the radical press nationwide, sent speakers across the country on 'missions', and organised the collection

of an enormous petition, bearing some 34,456 signatures.(see Fig.4) Despite great organisational difficulties (North Shields' "floating population" which made the collecting of signatures seem "like driving snails to Jerusalem"),the commitment of the council members ensured that the petition was filled up within six weeks.¹⁶² John Tennant of Seghill wrote to assure the Union that he had secured "every mans signature in our village excepting two or three solitary conservative devils"¹⁶³ The Petition is a remarkable example of the enthusiasm for reform which the N.R.U. generated in the region. An estimated six hundred yards of petition was finally presented to the House of Commons on February 29th 1859 by General T.Perronet Thompson M.P., who "gathered up as many petitions as he could carry between his elbows and his chin and marched up to the table amidst loud laughter".¹⁶⁴ A press circular calculated that the petition had been signed by more than half the adult male population of the region. Two thirds of the signatories were said to be working men and non-electors, and the predominant occupations of those who signed were clerks, agents, engineers, smiths, carpenters and miners.

John Bright's "sham radicalism" was not thought well of in the North, while H.J.Slack writing in December 1859 blamed the general apathy in the capital on the "Unpopularity of Mr.Bright who has been foolishly put forward as the Leader and who makes enemies every time he opens his mouth... ..Bright's abandonment of his own Bill looks bad..."¹⁶⁵ The Birmingham community, too, was less than enthusiastic about "Mr.Bright's mere rate-paying household suffrage".¹⁶⁶ Cowen was asked to press Bright to improve his Bill but, apart from appealing to Bright to reconsider, Cowen advised the Council to

...oppose no honest measure of Reform...but still firmly and

NORTHERN REFORM UNION PETITION 28.2.1859

<u>DISTRICT</u>	<u>PETITIONERS</u>	
Houghton-le-Spring	72	
Ebchester	80	
Backworth	95	
Hartley	124	
Westmoor	125	
Burradon	133	
Dudley	153	
Hetton-le-Hole	163	
Prudhoe and Mickley	186	
Wylam	232	
Easington Lane	239	
Windy Nook	250	
Jarrow	251	
Alnwick	252	
East & West Holywell	253	
Greenside & Barlow Spen	254	
Seghill	289	
Birtley & Chester-le-Street	340	
Sheriff Hill & Felling	384	
Swalwell	400	
Stockton	403	
Winlaton	462	
Seaton Delaval	475	
East & West Cramlington	558	
Shotley Bridge & Blackhall	568	
Blaydon	570	
Hartlepool	682	
Hexham	691	
Bedlington	705	
Hawick	781	
Crook	852	
Darlington	1054	
Blyth	1091	
Berwick upon Tweed	1494	
South Shields	1665	
Middlesbrough	1871	
North Shields	2331	
Gateshead	2393	
Sunderland	2551	
Newcastle upon Tyne	8984	Total Signatures: 34,456

persistently put your programme forward as the only sound one; and make it manifest that while you do not oppose a moderate measure, you only accept it as an instalment of your just rights.¹⁶⁷

Aside from the campaign for electoral reform, the Union became actively involved in exposing corruption at elections, especially in Berwick-on Tweed in 1859. And an attempt was made to field an NRU candidate in the Newcastle elections that same year. P.A.Taylor was recommended by Cowen largely because he had excellent republican and radical credentials but, unfortunately, "strong local and theological prejudices" operated against his selection and he only managed to raise 463 votes.¹⁶⁸ In August, Cowen himself was advised to stand at the Berwick election on the grounds that "The only way to recover corrupt boroughs is to field a candidate that will neither bribe nor be bribed".¹⁶⁹

It was to be many years before Cowen finally stood as a parliament-ary candidate but it seems clear that his support and standing in the local community was such that success could have been within his grasp, had he chosen to put himself forward. He was a natural leader; a good communicator and an inspired orator who could appeal to a broad cross section of society. He actively sought the loyalty and friendship of the working classes but in doing so he took care not to alienate other social groups. Through his father's contacts and friendships with early radicals he was able to bridge the gap between two generations of radical thought; retaining the best of the old traditional ideas but skilfully modifying tactics to meet the new political climate, he drew together all the disparate radical groups. The growing clamour for a Radical candidate for Newcastle grew out of his leadership of the Tyneside movement - and proved to be an ineluctable challenge with which the Liberals had to contend. The inescapable fact was that Newcastle was

destined to field a Radical candidate in the not too distant future. The question was simply whether that candidate was to take on Liberal colours. The compromise that was Radical Liberalism in Newcastle was, to all intents and purposes, Cowenite Radicalism, Liberalism being the sleeping partner of the arrangement; merely the modus operandi of obtaining a constitutional political voice.

NORTHERN REFORM UNION

COUNCIL MEMBERS:

Balks T. (Seaton Deleval)	Hindmarsh John (Hartlepool)
Bell John (South Shields)	Horncy William (Easington Lane)
Bell Joseph (Cramlington)	Hunter William* (Newcastle)
Blagburn John (Gateshead)	Jude Martin* (Newcastle)
Blakiston William (Middlesbrough)	Kane John* (Gateshead)
Bolton William (Hartlepool)	Larkin Charles (Newcastle)
Binns Stephen* (Newcastle)	Lishman Thomas* (Newcastle)
Bridges Jabez (Hartlepool)	Mathison Robert (Berwick)
Brown John* (Newcastle)	Messer Thomas (Burradon)
Brown John (York)	Mildred Charles (Darlington)
Brownless John (Darlington)	Moore John (Windy Nook)
Carse Henry (Shotley Bridge)	Oxberry John (Windy Nook)
Cook William* (Gateshead)	Ramsay Robert* (Blaydon)
Charlton Edward* (Newcastle)	Rayne Thomas (Winlaton)
Charlton George (Newcastle)	Reed Richard B. (Winlaton)
Cowen Joseph (Blaydon)	Ridley Ralph E. (Hexham)
Crichton William (Hawick)	Robinson Martin*
Cockburn Alex (Newcastle)	Ross William (Newcastle)
Curry Ralph* (Newcastle)	Rule David
Cummins John (Newcastle)	Soppett Thomas (Darlington)
Dixon Thomas (Blyth)	Summerside Edward* (Winlaton)
Dodds George (Newcastle)	Sutherland Robert (North Shields)
Doubleday Thomas* (Newcastle)	Tennant John (Seghill)
Douglass J. (Sunderland)	Thompson John
Dunn John (Sheriff Hill)	Thompson Thomas (North Shields)
Elgey William (Bowden Close)	Thompson Leonard
Emerson John* (Stella)	Thompson Joseph (Jarrow)
Ernest Charles (York)	Turnbull Richard
Falconar William (Darlington)	Walker James (Carlisle)
Fines Richard (Seghill)	Walker William (Newcastle)
Fleck Joseph (Hawick)	Warden Robert (Gateshead)
Gardner Robert (Swalwell)	Watt John (Newcastle)
Gibson John (Gateshead)	Wilde Anthony (Hetton-le-Hole)
Gilmour J.T.* (Newcastle)	Watson James* (Newcastle)
Grey Marshall (Newcastle)	White David
Gregson Thomas* (Newcastle)	Wilks Washington* (Carlisle)
Harle Peter (Wylam)	Wilkie Thomas (Newcastle)
Holt William	Williams James (Sunderland)
	Wilson Isaac (Crook)
	Wood Robert (Newcastle)
	Young George (East Holywell)

* denotes Chartist

REFERENCES TO THE TEXT

1. M.Chase: 'The Land and the Working Classes: English Agrarianism 1775-1851' PhD Thesis Sussex 1984; M.Chase: THE PEOPLE'S FARM: English Agrarian Radicalism 1775-1840 (1988); M.Chase: 'Paine, Spence and the Rights Of Man', BULLETIN SSLH Vol.52, No 3, 1987.
2. For example see N.McCord: NORTH EAST ENGLAND: The Region's Development 1760-1960 (1979) McCord claims there is 'little evidence for the existence of a continuous very widespread popular support for radical political agitations' and that the activity was the work of 'small' dedicated minorities'.p 79f; also see D.J.Rowe 'Some Aspects of Chartism on Tyneside' in INTERNATIONAL REVIEW OF SOCIAL HISTORY Vol.16, 1971.
3. G.Stedman Jones 'The Language of Class' in D.Thompson & J.Epstein (Eds): THE CHARTIST EXPERIENCE (1982) claims that the 'changing character and policies of the state' rendered the language of radicalism bankrupt, p52; in the same volume, J.Belchem: '1848 Feargus O'Connor and the Collapse of the Mass Platform', writes of the 'somewhat ignominious failure of the basic radical tactic', p 270.
4. J.H.Gleason: THE GENESIS OF RUSSOPHOBIA IN BRITAIN (1950) Gleason notes that Urquhart's Russophobic campaign in 1840 was most successful in Newcastle and Glasgow. p261; see also R.G.Gammage: THE HISTORY OF THE CHARTIST MOVEMENT 1837-54 (1854), p 189.
5. J.A.Davis: 'Garibaldi and England' in HISTORY TODAY Vol 32, 1982 suggests that republicanism was a short lived preoccupation at a time of political slough.
6. Newcastle Courant 24.7.1819; 7.8.1819.; 'The Petition of the Reformers of Newcastle Upon Tyne' 18.3.1823 from THE MARTIN COLLECTION; Northern Reformers Monthly Magazine and Political Register Vol.1 January 1823.; For a recent analysis of the N.P.U. see D.Ridley: 'The Spital Field Demonstration & the Parliamentary Reform Crisis in Newcastle upon Tyne' in North East Labour History Society BULLETIN No 26, 1992 who states that the N.P.U. played a pivotal role in securing the successful passage of the 1832 Reform Act.
7. Democratic Review 1849-1850, pp349f
8. see K.Tiller: 'Late Halifax Chartism 1847-58' in Thompson & Epstein op.cit. who states that 'The ideas and policies of Chartism continued to be independently articulated after 1858, later putting considerable pressure on established Liberalism', p 337.
9. COWEN PAPERS especially C152 Letter J.A.Langford - Cowen 20.8.1858; C267 J.P.Cobbett - Cowen 9.11.1858.
10. T.Tholfsen, for example, emphasises the force of radical faith given expression through Chartism and the 'softer form' of mid-Victorian radicalism, WORKING CLASS RADICALISM IN MID-VICTORIAN ENGLAND (1976), p 325.
11. Working class organisations are generally perceived to be purveyors of middle class values and instruments of social control, for instance see H.Perkin: THE ORIGINS OF MODERN BRITISH SOCIETY 1780-1880 (1969); J.Walton: LANCASHIRE A Social History 1558-1939 (1987), Chapter 12. For an appraisal of mechanics institutes in this respect see J.F.C.Harrison: LEARNING & LIVING 1790-1960 (1961).
12. G.D.H.Cole & R.Postgate: THE COMMON PEOPLE (1938) notes that in 1746 Newcastle had a number of Friendly Societies 'some of them embryonic forms of Trade Union', and the Society of Newcastle Shoemakers was established as early as 1719, pp 21, 172; also P.M.Ashraf: THE LIFE AND TIMES OF THOMAS

- SPENCE (1983) notes the 'awakening political consciousness' of Newcastle in 1774,p34.
- 13.G.Stedman Jones in Thompson & Epstein op.cit. p 13.
 - 14.For a discussion of 19th century land movements see R.Harrison:BEFORE THE SOCIALISTS Studies in Labour & Politics 1861-1881 (1965),p 214f; D.Martin 'Land Reform' in P.Hollis (Ed)PRESSURE FROM WITHOUT (1974)p 155; J.Belchem in Thompson & Epstein op.cit.
 - 15.T.Tholfson op.cit.p32f; D.Thompson:THE CHARTISTS (1984),p166,243.
 - 16.Cole & Postgate op.cit.p 184.
 - 17.P.M.Ashraf op.cit.has been well received but M.Chase's work,especially THE PEOPLES FARM op.cit. has had more impact on the debate.However his argument that Spence was more influential is not universally accepted.see G.Claey LABOUR HISTORY REVIEW Vol.55 Pt. 1 1990.
 - 18.M.Chase Thesis op.cit.p 78f.
 - 19 E.Royle:'Chartism' in A.Digby & C.Feinstein:NEW DIRECTIONS IN ECONOMIC & SOCIAL HISTORY (1989),p 162f; D.Thompson op.cit.p 302.
 - 20.P.M.Ashraf op.cit.p34
 - 21.Ibid.p17
 - 22.Ibid. p13.for a biographical sketch of Spence see T.M.Parsinon 'Thomas Spence' in J.O.Baylen & N.J.Gossman(Ed) BIOGRAHICAL DICTIONARY OF MODERN BRITISH RADICALS,Vol.2 1830-1870 (1984).
 - 23.Ashraf op.cit.p 29.
 - 24.Ibid.p 38
 - 25.M.Chase Thesis op.cit.p 46.
 - 26.M.Chase 'Paine,Spence & the Rights Of Man' op.cit.p 35.
 - 27.P.M.Ashraf op.cit.p 146
 - 28.COWEN PAPERS B248 Spch in Ncle. 28.1.1882;B349 Spch 1885; B415 undated Letter Cowen - H.B.Thompson; Northern Liberator 24.3.1838.
 - 29.P.M.Ashraf op.cit.p127.
 - 30.Northern Liberator 15.9.1838
 - 31.This theme has been explored by P.Pickering:'Class Without Words':Symbolic communication in the Chartist Movement' in PAST & PRESENT No 112; also see J.A.Epstein:'The Constitutional Idiom,Radical Reasoning,Rhetoric and Action in Early 19th century England' in JOURNAL OF SOCIAL HISTORY Spring 1990
 - 32.Northern Tribune Vol.11 p 376;Newcastle Journal 15.5.1832.
 - 33.Northern Liberator 1.6.1838
 - 34.D.J.Rowe:'Some Aspects of Chartism on Tyneside'in INTERNATIONAL REVIEW OF SOCIAL HISTORY Vol 16,1971.,arguing that the numbers at Chartist meetings were swelled by the curiosity of the crowd and attendances cannot be taken as an indication of support.
 - 35.Northern Liberator 25.5.1839
 - 36.P.M.Ashraf op.cit.p 48.
 - 37.Poster: O' Connor's Visit to Newcastle 14.9.1835
 - 38.Poster: Speech by Charles Larkin at a dinner for Charles Attwood and Thomas Doubleday 1833.
 - 39.Northern Liberator 29.12.1838
 - 40.T.J.Nossiter:INFLUENCE,OPINION & POLITICAL IDIOMS IN REFORMED ENGLAND:Case Studies from the North East 1832-74 (1975) p153f
 - 41.Ibid. for Chartist correspondence see Newcastle Weekly Chronicle 27.9.1884
 - 42.Poster 1840: Sketches of A System by a Tyne Chartist
 - 43.Poster 1840: Defeat of the O'Connellite Anti-Corn Law Conspirators
 - 44.G.S.Jones op.cit claims that Chartism was not a class based movement.For a counter argument see D.Thompson 'The Languages of Class'in BULLETIN SSLH

- Vol. 52, No 1 1987; N. Kirk: 'In Defence of Class' in INTERNATIONAL REVIEW OF SOCIAL HISTORY 1987
45. N. McCord: THE ANTI-CORN LAW LEAGUE (1958) p 45f
 46. Poster: Chartist Meeting in the Joiners Hall, Newcastle, December 1839
 47. Northern Tribune Vol. 12 p 376; Newcastle Courant 30.10.1819; THOMAS WILSON COLLECTION: Handbill: 28.6.1832 'Why has Fife left the N.P.U.?'
 48. Newcastle Journal 23.3.1832; COWEN PAPERS A270 Letter Charles Attwood to Cowen objecting to John Fife's membership of the Foreign Affairs Committee and refers to the events of 1832.12.12.1854
 49. N. McCord op.cit. p 50
 50. Ibid. p 150; also D. Martin op.cit. p 144
 51. D. Thompson op.cit. p 304
 52. See J. Saville Introduction to R. G. Gammage: THE HISTORY OF THE CHARTIST MOVEMENT Facsimile of 2nd Ed., 1969; A. Briggs: CHARTIST STUDIES (1959)
 53. R. Church: 'Chartism and the Miners: A Reinterpretation' in LABOUR HISTORY REVIEW Vol 56, Pt. 3, 1991
 54. R. Colls: THE PITMEN OF THE NORTHERN COALFIELD Work, Culture and Protest 1790-1850 (1987); K. Wilson 'Political Radicalism In the N. East of England 1830-60' Unpublished PhD thesis (Durham) 1987
 55. Northern Liberator 25.5.1839.
 56. Ibid.
 57. Ibid. various dates for reports of 'missions' to Seghill, Walker, Gosforth Row Elswick, Benwell and Sheriff Hill, especially 25.5.1839
 58. R. Church op.cit. p 33
 59. R. Challoner & B. Ripley: THE MINERS ASSOCIATION A Trade Union in the Age of the Chartists (1968) p 224. For a biography of W. P. Roberts see R. Challinor A RADICAL LAWYER IN VICTORIAN ENGLAND (1990)
 60. Challinor & Ripley op.cit p 217. T. S. Duncome was M.P. for Hartford 1826-32; Finsbury 1834-61; presented the Charter to H. of C. in 1842; President of the United Trades for the Protection of Labour, a campaigner for mining reforms and a member of the Peoples International League.
 61. R. Colls op.cit. p 286
 62. Newcastle Chronicle 4.5.1849 states that the majority attending the meeting were 'working class'.
 63. The inaugural meeting was addressed by 'messrs Charlton, Wilkie & Dodds'
 64. Newcastle Chronicle 2.11.1849 claims that the skilled working class were sustaining the radical movement
 65. M. Chase thesis op.cit. p 250 stating that the Met. Parliamentary and Financial Reform Association comprised many former Anti-Corn Law Leaguers such as Cobden and Morley
 66. A. R. Schoyen: THE CHARTIST CHALLENGE (1958) p 148
 67. Democratic Review February 1850 'The Charter and Something More' p 350
 68. F. B. Smith: RADICAL ARTISAN. W. J. LINTON 1812-97 (1973) p 108
 69. Democratic Review June 1849. 'Terrigeneous' also contributed to the Red Republican. In an article dated 9.11.1850 Harney refers to Terrigeneous as 'a working man'.
 70. Democratic Review February 1850 p 352.
 71. Red Republican Vol. No 1 22.6.1850
 72. D. Martin op.cit. p 150f suggests that Cobden's involvement in land reform was important; by keeping agrarianism at the top of the agenda he was able to ensure that the Liberals obtained and retained radical support.
 73. COWEN PAPERS A247 F.A.C. meeting 29.11.1854
 74. Northern Liberator 15.9.1838

75. COWEN PAPERS: Jane Cowen Mss. Chapter 7.
76. There were some notable exceptions for example, Leicester. see B. Lancaster: RADICALISM, COOPERATION & SOCIALISM. Leicester Working Class Politics 1860-1906 (1987)
77. Northern Liberator 15.9.1838
78. Nossiter op.cit.p152; Northern Liberator 17.2.1838
79. Valedictory Address of the Newcastle W.M.A. Northern Liberator 17.2.1838
80. see BIOGRAPHICAL DICTIONARY OF MODERN BRITISH RADICALS op.cit; the COWEN PAPERS contain some correspondence from Attwood (who did not leave any political papers) His brother Thomas was founder of the B.P.U.
81. C.Flick: THE BIRMINGHAM POLITICAL UNION (1978) This account barely mentions Charles, even though the two Unions were closely linked.
82. COWEN PAPERS: D87 Northern Tribune Vol.11 p321
83. T.A.Devyr: THE ODDBOOK OF THE NINETEENTH CENTURY (1882) p 164
84. This argument has been explored by J.H.Gleason op.cit.p 284; R.Shannon: 'D.Urquhart and the Foreign Affairs Committees' in P.Hollis(Ed) op.cit.p 247; P.Hollis & B.Harrison 'Chartism, Liberalism and the Life of Robert Lowery' in ENGLISH HISTORICAL REVIEW 1967 No82
85. Gleason op.cit.p284
86. A.Wilson: THE CHARTIST MOVEMENT IN SCOTLAND (1970) p 113
87. Gammage op.cit.p 189; Schoyen op.cit.p241 notes that Urquhart split the Chartists in 1840
88. Jane Cowen Mss op.cit. also see COWEN PAPERS A 197
89. COWEN PAPERS A42 19.5.51
90. A number of historians have identified internationalism as a unifying factor.e.g.F.M.Leventhal: RESPECTABLE RADICAL: George Howell and Victorian Working Class Politics (1971)p 45; J.Hinton: LABOUR AND SOCIALISM (1983) p10; J.Vincent: THE FORMATION OF THE BRITISH LIBERAL PARTY 1857-68 (1976)
91. A.Briggs: VICTORIAN PEOPLE (1954) p 223f
92. Newcastle Chronicle 31.8.1849 delegates included Victor Hugo, Cobden, Henry Vincent and Joseph Sturge.
93. F.B.Smith op.cit.p 91
94. COWEN PAPERS A8 Address of the Peoples Int.League.members included P.A.Taylor J.Stansfield, W.J.Linton, J.H.Parry, T.S.Duncome and William Shaen. Founded Wm Ashurst Jnr in 1847, it was later absorbed into the Society of the Friends of Italy 1851-6.Cowen was active in both organisations.
95. F.B.Smith op.cit.p 91
96. Democratic Review October 1849
97. H.Perkin op.cit.
98. F.G.& R.M.Black(Ed) THE HARNEY PAPERS (1969) Letter Harney to Engels 30.6.1846
99. Ibid.p 244 fn Harney founded the Fraternal Democrats in 1845
100. Ibid.Letter Mazzini to Harney 1845
101. Northern Star March 1849
102. see J.Saville Intro.to the Red Republican p x Vol.1
103. Schoyen op.cit.p 240f; COWEN PAPERS A 247 F.A.C.Minutes; Jane Cowen Mss. op.cit.Chapter9 states the the Committee was 'Cowenite'
104. COWEN PAPERS B41 Blaydon Store was opened March 1859
105. Newcastle Guardian 29.4.1848
106. Gateshead Observer 15.4.1848 Committee included George Crawshay, Thomas Wilke, George Charlton, John Blakey, J.T.Gilmour, Robert Bainbridge and John Mawson
107. COWEN PAPERS F12 1846

108. Ibid. various references, including D19 Spch. at Scotswood, Ncle.
109. Newcastle Chronicle 2.11.1849 the aim of the meeting was said to be 'parliamentary reform, economy in public expenditure and a reduction of excessive taxation'
110. COWEN PAPERS Letter Cowen to J. Passmore Edwards 22.3.1852 asking for a donation to the Subscription for European Freedom. Edwards wanted the money to be spent on peace tracts not guns.
111. Harrison & Hollis op.cit. p512; see also by the same authors ROBERT LOWERY RADICAL & CHARTIST (1979)
112. COWEN PAPERS letter Cowen to Samuel Beale in reply to his protest at the "warlike attitude" of the members of the Subscription.
113. COWEN PAPERS Circular letter of the Peoples Int. League A16.
114. COWEN PAPERS A17 Address of the Peoples Int. League
115. Ibid.
116. F.B. Smith op.cit. p 60 calls the Address "one of the most momentous harbingers of the present world"
117. Ibid. The English Republic was published in monthly editions from 1851 and Cowen is said to have met all the costs of publication. p102; see also O.R. Ashton: W.E. ADAMS: CHARTIST, RADICAL & JOURNALIST 1832-1906 (1991)
118. COWEN PAPERS C480 letter Cowen to J. Baxter Langley 6.2.1859; C481 Baxter Langley to Cowen same date.
119. Jane Cowen mss op.cit. Chapter 9 p 3
120. Ibid.
121. COWEN PAPERS D87 Northern Tribune Vol1 January 1854. It began circulation as a monthly and later became a weekly journal
122. Ibid; see also F.B. Smith op.cit. p 50
123. COWEN PAPERS: Republican Record January 1855
124. Ibid.
125. see Linton's English Republic and Harney's Democratic Review
126. COWEN PAPERS A42 19.5.1851; A60 Concert by Band of Hope to raise funds for the refugees
127. Jane Cowen Mss op.cit. Chapter 5 account of a meeting 19.5.1851
128. COWEN PAPERS A152 24.3.1852
129. COWEN PAPERS various including D87, E8, E443, A648. The sword was manufactured at Birmingham and the testimonial cost £10.13/3d; the deficit, £1.16/10d was paid by Cowen
130. Jane Cowen Mss op.cit. Chapter 7 Letter Garibaldi to Cowen 27.7.1860
131. COWEN PAPERS A 241 Printed Petition
132. M. Taylor: 'The old radicalism and the new: David Urquhart and the politics of opposition, 1832-1867' in E.F. Biagini & A.J. Reid (Ed): CURRENTS OF RADICALISM Popular radicalism, organised labour and party politics in Britain 1850-1914 (1991)
133. COWEN PAPERS letter Charles Attwood to Cowen 8.12.1854
134. COWEN PAPERS Financial statement of the F.A.C. shows that Cowen was the largest contributor to the Committee's funds. Although officially he was Secretary, unofficially he also controlled the groups finances
135. Schoyen op.cit. p 89f
136. M. Taylor op.cit notes the independence of the Newcastle Committee p 36
137. Northern Tribune Vol. No 12 March 1855
138. Jane Cowen Mss op.cit chapter 10 Cowen Spch at Nelson St. 12.12.1853
139. Ibid.
140. Northern Tribune 16.5.1855
141. COWEN PAPERS A241

142. Northern Daily Express 13.5.1857 Report of a Speech by Cowen
143. COWEN PAPERS C6 Minutes of the Northern Reform Union, Qtr. Mtg 5.4.1858
144. Ibid. C6 Circular 21.9.1858
145. Ibid. C6 October 1858
146. Ibid. C6 Qtr. Mtg. 19.9.1859
147. Ibid. C6 Circular of the NRU 11.10.1859
148. COWEN PAPERS E386 Obituary in the Cheltenham Examiner 28.2.1900
149. Daily Chronicle & N. Counties Advertiser 11.1.1859
150. Daily Chronicle & N. Counties Advertiser 8.3.1859
151. Newcastle Daily Chronicle 8.12.1859 Holyoake writing under a pseudonym 'Disque'
152. COWEN PAPERS C21 11.1.1858
153. COWEN PAPERS C377 2.1.1859
154. COWEN PAPERS C800 19.10.1859
155. COWEN PAPERS letter to the Northern Reform Record September 1858
156. COWEN PAPERS C1009 27.12.1859
157. T.J. Nossiter op.cit. p 159; also see C. Muris 'The Northern Reform Union 1858-1862' Unpublished MA Dissertation (Durham) 1959
158. COWEN PAPERS various including C181, C152, C279, C190
159. COWEN PAPERS C196 Letter Doubleday to Cowen 4.10.1858
160. COWEN PAPERS C464 4.1.1859 refers to the attempt by Orsini to assassinate Louis Napoleon and his part in the plot. (He tested the bombs) see G.J. Holyoake: SIXTY YEARS OF AN AGITATORS LIFE (1906) Cowen was almost certainly involved though this was never proven. N. Todd op.cit. pp8-9
161. COWEN PAPERS C355 Letter Frank Grant to R.B. Reed 23.12.1858
162. COWEN PAPERS C387 Thomas Thompson to Reed 10.1.1859
163. COWEN PAPERS C391 John Tennant to Reed 10.1.1859
164. COWEN PAPERS C547 28.2.1859
165. COWEN PAPERS C1029 H.J. Slack to Reed 31.12.1859
166. COWEN PAPERS Henry Cooper to Reed C357 24.12.1858
167. COWEN PAPERS 20.9.1859
168. COWEN PAPERS C6 20.5.1858; 19.9.1859
169. COWEN PAPERS C696 E.S. Pryce to Cowen 11.8.1859

CHAPTER 3: THE MAKING OF A RADICAL CITADEL 1847-1873

The purpose of this chapter is to challenge the widely held view that Tyneside was a bastion of Liberalism for the greater part of the nineteenth century.¹ To a certain extent, historians of the period have relied heavily upon parliamentary statistics which testify to the unusual consistency with which Liberal members were returned at successive elections. Liberal allegiances in the North East displayed none of the peaks and troughs which assailed the rest of the political heartland at times of crisis and, given the dynastic dominance of local politics by the Cowen family, it is easy to see why the existence of an indomitable Liberal hegemony should be universally accepted. Granted, such views are always tempered by an acknowledgement that the Cowens represented the radical wing of the Party but nevertheless Tyneside retains a Liberal profile which constitutes a virtual negation of the prevailing radical culture. Post-Chartist radicalism has benefited from recent revisionary studies which identify a demonstrable strand of continuity throughout the nineteenth century and beyond² but, even so, there is little indication that the deeper implications of that reconstruction are being actively pursued. Radicalism, conspicuously lacking an official party structure and a designated leadership, is still largely relegated to the realms of faction and any redefinition of the political landscape seems remote; the presumed polarity of Victorian politics remains as inviolable as ever.

The unusual resilience of local radicalism at mid century has already been established in the previous chapter. The intention here is to consider whether the characteristic features of radicalism continue to be located, at the same primary level, in a city so precisely labelled 'Liberal'. Cowen's own ideological stance must be of crucial importance here, particularly as the

political equilibrium was pre-eminently controlled by him as he exerted a seemingly charismatic influence over the local electorate. McCalmont's Parliamentary Poll Book³ which identifies him as a 'Radical' member while, significantly, other notable Radicals such as A.J.Mundella, Joseph Chamberlain and even Ernest Jones, the former Chartist, are registered as 'Liberals', indicates that Cowen's radicalism was officially recognised as more than just a mutant form of Liberalism. And, if we accept John Vincent's assessment that this is the "sociological document par excellence...the irrefutable corrective of received ideas", a redefinition of Tyneside politics would seem to be long overdue.⁴ But however persuasive this evidence may be, it must be vulnerable to accusations of pedantry and, in any event, there is clearly a requirement to construct an altogether more cohesive and compelling argument. According to Vincent

"Popular radicalism was the product of the leisure of Saturday night and Sunday morning, the pothouse and the chapel, not of the working week."⁵

Urban associational life, which has been plundered in the search for the roots of popular Liberalism, will be carefully scrutinized to determine whether, as it would seem, the radical agenda was at least as important and, in many instances, a far more potent imperative. Cowen's grip on the plethora of working class organisations across the spectrum of work and leisure will be demonstrated, with particular reference to the way a network of core activists enabled him to proselytize Cowenite Radicalism in an ever widening sphere of influence.

Tyneside's institutional canvass was extremely rich and wide-ranging and, clearly, it would be impossible to give equal consideration to all the

organisations with which Cowen had detectable links. Consequently, this study will focus primarily on the activities of the major 'improving' organisations such as cooperatives, mechanics' institutes, and Temperance societies in order to consider whether they were truly "instruments of working class amelioration".⁶ A thorough examination of the principles they enunciated and the activities they pursued should determine whether they adhere to the accepted archetype. Throughout the 1860's and 70's agrarian ideas continued to inform local radicalism and schemes to advance the wider distribution of the land found their way onto most, if not all, associational agendas. The argument advanced here is that this persistent recourse to traditional agrarianism is a more valid criterion for assessing the strength of radicalism than any crude measurement of the popular response to David Urquhart, the Tichborne Claimant or Henry George.⁷

Cowen's funeral in February 1900 united "Clergymen and coalowners, non-conformist ministers and miners, licensed victuallers and Temperance reformers, quakers and soldiers" in what was justifiably described as a "democratic gathering".⁸ The strength of his radicalism lay in its broad appeal, effectively cutting across the customary barriers of class, religion and party politics, and stressing above all else the importance of rights not privileges.

Aristocracy is class rule, Ochlocracy is mob rule. Timocracy is the rule of the rich, but Democracy is people's rule, the rule of all, rich and poor, lord and labourer, priest and layman. It draws its strength from its universality and its freedom.⁹

Such views were unusual then, to say the least. The concept of universal

democracy had few adherents within the Liberal party and even the 'People's William' declared himself to be "an out and out inequalitarian".¹⁰ The avowed commitment to widen the franchise was firmly limited to men of independent means¹¹, to those judged to have demonstrated sufficient moral rectitude to pose no threat to the status quo. Generally speaking, members of mechanics' institutes, cooperatives, friendly societies and temperance groups were considered the most worthy recipients of the extended franchise. Liberal historians have highlighted middle class patronage of these organisations and argued that social control was the primary purpose - and the ultimate reward - of their paternalistic involvement.¹² Indeed, Harold Perkin's insistence that mechanics' institutes were "infiltrated" implies that far from widening the franchise the Liberals were determined to limit access to those who had formally embraced the prescribed 'entrepreneurial ideal'.¹³

There are good grounds for accepting this analysis. Surviving records give eloquent testimony of the middle class credentials of most executive committees. In 1853 when James Hole published his critical appraisal¹⁴ he claimed that the prevalent undemocratic organisation and narrow, discriminatory appeal of most institutes had been prohibitive and, as a result, the movement had largely failed to serve the working classes. The problems he identified in Yorkshire were those which had bedevilled mechanics' institutes everywhere, the North East included. In the 1840's mechanics' institutes tended to serve only "the studious few" and the provision of newspapers and novels was frowned upon as "either useless or dangerous".¹⁵ In 1848, the Dean of Durham struck a similar cautionary note in his address at the opening of the new Mechanics' Hall in Gateshead. An audience composed mainly of the affluent and well-to-do were warned of the "dangerous combinations" that would arise if the working classes were not appropriately educated. "Mis-instruction",

as well as general ignorance, had to be rigorously combatted:

If mechanics' institutes are liberally and judiciously regulated, they may become the means of extending to the very humblest classes, the benefits which they need most.¹⁶

Judicious regulation, of course, dictated the imposition of a total ban on the discussion of politics and theology,¹⁷ the latter rule doubtless reflecting the active involvement of the local clergy who were often executive members. All too frequently, the lecture programme was delivered by the local minister who, especially in remote rural areas, may have been the only person qualified to argue the finer points of botany or astronomy. On the other hand, discussion of political economy was positively encouraged. In the early years of the movement, this was not considered a controversial or party political subject. There was a widespread belief that acceptance of its basic principles would mitigate against the evils of social unrest and immure the working classes against the evils of trade union agitation.¹⁸

In January 1847, when Cowen inaugurated the Winlaton Literary and Scientific Society, there was nothing in the proposed rules or statement of principles to suggest that it would differ, in the slightest degree, from the hundreds of other institutes already in existence. The Rules, which conformed precisely to the established orthodoxy, as well as the official declaration "to promote the moral and intellectual advancement of its members" were probably lifted verbatim from the handbook of the Newcastle Institute, his father being an executive member at the time.¹⁹ Such 'borrowings' were destined to be short-lived. Cowen would have been well aware of the falling membership and mounting debts which threatened the viability of the Newcastle Institute and have made some sort of analysis of the cause. But more crucially, even at this young age, he was already a committed Ultra-Radical and promoting

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an undemocratic organisation would have been anathema. At the official opening in February Cowen's address placed the Institute on a firm radical footing. The Winlaton Institute was to be

...open to all, irrespective of their mark or station, without regard to their religious or political sentiments....a campaign against ignorance, a battle against bigotry and prejudice.²⁰

Whereas other institutes aimed to improve the morality of the working classes, Cowen insisted that they would strive for "mutual moral improvement".²¹ And, warning against the dangers of party politics, he expressed the hope that the Institute would protect members from

...the machinations of unprincipled demagogues and aspirants to popular power who might work to mislead them for the promotion of their own sinister and selfish purposes.²²

This may seem somewhat strange, given that Cowen was using the Institute to further his own ambitions, but he probably would have exempted himself on the grounds that his motives were generous, as well as self-serving. There was no question of limiting the membership to men. At the outset, Cowen's open access policy provided specially reduced rates for women and their children, although it stopped short of permitting them to stand for office.²³ Partly, this was a reward for those women, including his own mother, who had played a key role in raising the initial capital but it was also an unequivocal demonstration of the kind of democratic structure he wanted to put in place. The inherent contradiction of denying women any official power must be set alongside the progressive principle employed in offering men and women the same educational opportunities. When the rules were modified again in July to guarantee that at least half the committee would be working class, Cowen declared himself

satisfied that they had achieved "the happy union of rich and poor, great and small".²⁴ By the end of the first six months the Institute had some fifty members and plans were already in hand to establish a similar institute at Blaydon.

Needless to say, Cowen's innovations met with significant opposition yet he still persisted, regardless of the difficulties of hiring rooms and preventing the wilful sabotage of all his attempts to publicize the Insitute's activities.²⁵ A keelman, Thomas Vallance, was elected President of the Blaydon and Stella Institute and it subsequently "served as a model" for a dozen similar institutions within a twelve mile radius.²⁶ Cowen's missionary zeal in personally promoting popular education was to pay enormous dividends later on. Charismatic leadership, as defined by Weber, is said to depend upon a responsive recognition of virtue("Charisma is never a source of private gain") and, in the first instance, an ability to demonstrate that he/she can achieve success where others have failed ("If he wants to be a prophet, he must perform miracles").²⁷ There can be little doubt that Cowen's charismatic leadership owed much to this initial show of strength and to the benefits that were perceived by the working classes to have resulted from it. By 1856, the Blaydon Institute was entirely controlled by working men "who very wisely dispense with the formal patronage of those who do not feel the want and therefore cannot realize the benefit of such a society".²⁸ Cowen's network of radical contacts ensured that the Blaydon Institute was never short of a distinguished speaker. The Hungarian exile, Louis Kossuth, and the conspirator, Felice Orsini, were both given honorary life membership while even Garibaldi found time to address the Institute during his brief visit to Tyneside in 1854.²⁹ But aside from the valuable contributions of experienced lecturers, such as Holyoake and Bradlaugh, the members themselves were largely responsible

for the delivery of lectures which exhibited a markedly radical tone. The 1848 Revolutions, State Education, Italian Emancipation and 'The Male vs The Female Mind' all found their way onto the lecture programme. Thus, while the Alnwick Institute was seemingly content to explore 'The Rise and Progress of Botany',³⁰ the Winlaton members were being stirred by the abolitionist, William Brown.³¹ As an active proponent of self-education, Cowen utilized the persuasive radical slogan "knowledge is power" to encourage local institutes to expand the scope of their educational facilities. Nevertheless, some institutes, for example North Shields, remained resistant to change. At a time when the Winlaton Institute was receiving 2 daily and 17 weekly newspapers, selected by a ballot of the members, a proposal to introduce newspapers was summarily rejected.³² Ultimately, these needs were only met by the opening of a News Room, at a low subscription. The Newcastle Guardian was prompted to query the necessity for a rival institution at all but to little avail.³³

Under Cowen's careful guidance, the Blaydon Institute went from strength to strength. Opposition notwithstanding, by 1852 sufficient funds were generated to finance a new, purpose built institute with extensive educational and recreational facilities, including a playground for the children. The local people benefited from the improved provision of elementary education, much of it being offered without charge and available to non-members.³⁴ Many of his innovations were a direct response to criticisms he heard levied at a working men's gathering. With good reason, they claimed that lectures and subscription rates were pitched at a level which discriminated against the unskilled working classes. The necessary changes were promptly implemented for as Cowen observed "the Mob are the very parties we want"³⁵ and, exerting his considerable influence with the newly formed Northern Union of Mechanics' Institutes, they were gradually adopted as standard practice by most of the

affiliated institutes.

Regular entertainment was always an important feature of institute life. The family piano, trundled back and forth between Stella Hall and the Institute, gave stirring service at numerous concerts while Cowen took upon himself the task of providing scenery and hiring singers and musicians. As his daughter Jane recalled:

He took along one of the kid glove and white waistcoat class of reformers, who philosophize about the working classes at a distance but who never go among them....and his feeble nerves were shaken."Why,he exclaimed,all the rabble of Blaydon are here!"³⁶

Such recreation, he believed, served a two-fold function: as an attractive alternative to the local tap-room, which would discourage intemperance and its ill-effects, and as the best means of introducing its educational facilities to those who might otherwise have remained uninterested. Unfortunately, the Institute's success was marred by frequent clashes with the local clergy and a "few narrow minded dissenters".³⁷ The decision to hold Sunday meetings aroused considerable opposition but Cowen confounded his critics by disputing that one day was any holier than another:

God is omnipresent.It is not the day but ourselves we are to keep holy.The Sabbath was intended for doing good, and in disseminating knowledge...in stirring the people to the practice of virtue, justice, temperance and charity, we are doing good. I object not merely to the Sabbath, but to all formal worship of any kind.³⁸

Naturally, the expression of such sentiments did not endear him to the local churchmen and festering resentment finally came to a head in 1856 over the vexed issue of secular education. The institute's non-sectarian policy positively encouraged freedom of theological discussion, on the grounds that anything less was discriminatory. But Cowen's plan to provide a 'neutral

ground' for persons with conflicting religious and political views brought forth widespread accusations that he was encouraging atheism. The Northern Daily Express roundly condemned the policy, claiming that atheism "ought to be fenced off wherever young people are moving about".³⁹ They were even threatened with prosecution under the blasphemy laws but, undaunted, Cowen mounted a vigorous defence in a letter to The Times.⁴⁰ It is a measure of the independence of the Blaydon institute that it was able to stand firm against this level of censure when, elsewhere, attempts to overturn the restriction on religion and politics were effectively blocked.⁴¹ The antagonists were forced to accept that their coercive methods had failed and, in the aftermath, a rival institute was set up ("weak in numbers, but strong in rancour"). If anything, the Blaydon Institute was rather strengthened by the affair and a gratified crowd of some 1500 people gathered for the 12th Annual Soiree to hear Cowen report that the Institute represented "full nine tenths of the inhabitants".⁴²

Cowen's boundless energies for reform were not solely confined to the Blaydon Institute. As secretary of the Northern Union of Mechanics' Institutes he aimed to bring radical ideas to bear upon all existing and new societies, to cultivate a new radical generation both willing and able to embrace the demand for 'The Charter and something more', and to promote his own political philosophy. In the course of its brief circulation The Northern Tribune, officially the organ of Cowen's Republican Brotherhood, played a vital role in the campaign for the 'mental, moral and political advancement, and regeneration of the People'.⁴³ With its emphasis on education, the attributes and failings of mechanics' institutes were just as appropriate a focus as European nationalism and electoral reform. The education and welfare provisions of Sir Ambrose Crowley were offered as a model, as was the Blaydon

Institute, but the Northern Union was heavily criticized for failing to concentrate its influence where it could be most effective. Cowen wanted the Union to be restricted to Tyneside, where the involvement of large landowners and the clergy was, in the main, not so significant. This, of course, would have greatly enhanced his own influence within the Union. He was scathing about the Union's annual dinner which, with its establishment overtones, epitomised everything he was fighting against:

...something about the War, the Ministry all right, the noisy
Radicals of Shields all wrong...a good deal of eating and drinking
...The sooner it is remodelled, or dead, the better.⁴⁴

Mining villages, such as Killingworth, Marley Hill and Bedlington, were more often than not the most receptive to Cowen's radical ideas and, generally speaking, their institutes continued to flourish long after others had been swallowed up by the Free Library Movement.⁴⁵ By the late 1860's many institutes had foundered, their members lured by the "seductive attractions of the beershop", to the grave disappointment of those who had expected them to "revolutionize society".⁴⁶ The Union, despite Cowen's promptings, remained unwieldy and resistant to change. The introduction of an Essay Competition in 1879, found the Union still pondering over the same old questions ("To what extent will scientific instruction improve the condition of the industrial classes"?) but unwilling, or unable, to progress beyond any theoretical resolution of the problem.⁴⁷ The winners(a clerk and two check-weighmen) were stirring examples of the originally targeted artisanal class but then, perhaps, they were the only working class group that might reasonably be expected to respond to such a question. The executive remained an unhappy combination of radical activists, like Cowen, James Mckendrick and John Oxberry, and establishment figures such as Earl Percy. Newcastle did not

obtain its own library until 1880, some twenty years after the Northern Tribune had welcomed the Free Library movement as "a step in the right direction" and William Brockie had applauded the elevating effects of Manchester Free Library which compared so unfavourably with the "petty bickering and cavilling" that typified most mechanics' institutes.⁴⁸

To summarise then, Cowen's intervention was an enabling force. Although his influence was unevenly spread, particularly in rural villages, the Tyneside working classes achieved a level of control over their own mechanics' institutions which distinguished them from those in other areas. In the process, members learned to endorse Cowenite Radicalism through his direction of their institutional guidelines, educational agenda and lecture programmes.

It is hardly surprising that there should be a considerable crossover of membership between mechanics' institutes and cooperative societies, given that both espoused a common commitment to the principle of self help. This relationship was particularly close in the North East. In the autumn of 1858 Cowen gave a series of lectures in the Blaydon Institute on Cooperation. Reading aloud extracts from Holyoake's book 'Self Help by the People', which charted the foundation of the Rochdale store, he urged the membership to consider opening a store of their own.⁴⁹ Shortly afterwards, in December 1858, the first cooperative store in the North East came to be established, initially operating from two hired rooms, but soon sufficiently solvent to finance independent premises. All previous attempts to introduce Cooperation into the region had failed dismally. The inordinate hostility to Robert Owen when he visited Newcastle in 1843 persuaded him, at least, that the local people were not amenable to cooperative ideas. And as Cowen observed

They were not successful. They were to a great extent connected

with political organisations; their management was incapable and not very harmonious; and their death was somewhat disastrous.⁵⁰

Thomas Doubleday⁵¹, an old Chartist friend of Cowen's, tried to deter him from becoming involved:

You will make or help to make these Northumbrian workmen Tories if you try to get them into too good condition. Try to inculcate good, sound Radical doctrines, and let the material part of the business take care of itself.⁵²

Doubleday's fears were not entirely groundless. Mid century Cooperation seemed set on severing the old ties with Owenite idealism, and its concomitant stress on community building, in pursuance of more immediate goals- namely, an improvement in the material and social welfare of its members.⁵³ Cowen, however, disagreed that the latter aims were incompatible with his own radical philosophy. He was quite convinced that the spread of Cooperation would provide a unique opportunity "of educating them to a better understanding of our principles".⁵⁴ When a working man bragged to him that the Blaydon store was "the best thing going; at the end of the last quarter it made its members a present of £5", he was not at all dismayed, so confident was he that pecuniary interests could easily be replaced by more positive cooperative values.⁵⁵

Cowen was always a firm advocate of self help but his belief in the overarching principle of collective rather than individual action prompted him to direct local cooperative energies into the wider radical sphere. While he was quick to acknowledge the importance of unadulterated food, reasonable prices, and the avoidance of credit and debt he was far more concerned to promote the indirect moral and educational benefits. He was convinced that greater unity would have to be achieved if the working classes were to ever successfully press for political and social reforms. In his view, too many schemes for reform had failed in the past because of what he identified as

deep divisions within the working classes. They were, he said, far too suspicious and mistrustful of each other, especially in matters where money was involved. Involvement in the commercial and business aspects of cooperatives would, on the one hand, encourage a greater understanding of the fluctuations of trade and ultimately reduce the likelihood of strikes and disputes. Equally, he expected that the same cooperative experience could also "be brought to bear at the hustings".⁵⁶ It was his ability to pursue both immediate and long term objectives, realistic and idealistic goals, that singled him out from many other prominent cooperators and which may be said to account for the phenomenal success of Cooperation in the North East.

Of course, in sheer weight of numbers, Northern Cooperation could not possibly compete with Yorkshire or Lancashire but then societies in those counties had a far longer history and an altogether larger population. It is only when statistics for other 'Radical' centres such as Birmingham and Sheffield are taken account of that the true scale of local Cooperation emerges. In 1873, when there were 43,615 members in the two counties of Northumberland and Durham, Birmingham had just 128 registered cooperators in an estimated population of 343,000. Sheffield, similarly, could only boast of a mere 600, although its population stood at 240,000.⁵⁷ Cowen's proselytizing efforts were largely responsible for the movement's rapid progress, not least because existing mechanics' institutes gave him ready access to those who were most likely to be receptive to cooperative ideas. By April 1862, Cowen was able to call together delegates from twenty three local societies to consider the viability of forming a Central Cooperative Committee for the North of England.⁵⁸ Having undertaken a comprehensive national survey of the larger cooperative societies he was persuaded that access to wholesale trading was essential. While Lancashire cooperators were still debating the issue, plans

were already well in hand for the establishment of a central purchasing store and a management committee had been duly elected.⁵⁹ Unfortunately, not everyone shared Cowen's enthusiasm for setting up a Northern Cooperative Union. The members of small societies in particular were strongly opposed to any outside interference and proposals to appoint an official accountant and introduce bulk buying were vigorously opposed.⁶⁰ As late as 1870, the Cramlington society was still trying to overcome the reservations of its membership, even though the financial advantages of utilising the C.W.S. had by then become widely accepted.⁶¹ The Blaydon society, needless to say, was one of the first to become a member of the North of England Wholesale Society when it was finally established in Manchester in 1864.⁶²

Cowen's Cooperative Union was rather more successful in providing a unified central structure for the pursuance of his wider radical aims. Given that Cowen's Northern Reform Union was gathering momentum at roughly the same time as Cooperation began to have an impact in the region, the available evidence suggests that the two movements were being promoted in tandem. The Newcastle Chronicle, too, had just been acquired by Cowen and he was not slow to exploit its full potential as a vehicle for promoting his political ideas. An exhaustive survey of individual cooperative societies was carried in the Newcastle Weekly Chronicle throughout 1867, demonstrating more forcefully than anything else that Cooperation was to be regarded as a legitimate and important expression of local radicalism. Cowen's intervention in securing special trains for working men was in no small measure a response to their stated desire to continue to live near their cooperative store.⁶³ A good example of the harmonisation of local radicalism may be found in the way that two disparate campaigns contributed to the expansion and progress of cooperative enterprises in the North East.

The campaign by the Nine Hours League to reduce the traditional working week of engineering workers had reverberations that extended beyond the immediate interests of the those who agitated the dispute in 1871.⁶⁴ Two leading working class cooperators, James McKendrick and Matthew Pletts, played a prominent role in the dispute, while Cowen himself acted as principal arbiter. The viability of venturing into the sphere of cooperative production had from time to time exercised the minds of the cooperative leadership who were already persuaded that this should be a primary objective.⁶⁵ A number of small productive enterprises had already been established on Tyneside⁶⁶ when the engineer's strike raised the whole level of the debate. Addressing a meeting of interested groups in the Mechanics' Institute, Dr J.H.Rutherford⁶⁷ said that mediating between the competing claims of capital and labour was "one of the most serious problems of the time...it was nothing less than social war -industrial war -and it was,or threatened to be, chronic". The employers, argued Rutherford, would have to recognise that workers had "a will and a brain as well as a stomach". And, citing the example of Briggs & Co.⁶⁸,he urged them to support the formation of a cooperative engineering works, to be based at Ouseburn in Newcastle. As the Cowenite press was quick to point out, cooperative membership had provided a "fair proportion" of the strikers with a reserve fund and this had alleviated the strain on League funds.⁶⁹ When the Ouseburn Works were officially opened in July, all prospective employees were required to take up a £5 share in the company (paid for by instalments) and to sign over an agreed percentage of their income for the purchase of additional shares.A 54 hour working week was officially introduced, with an inbuilt proviso that further reductions in working hours would be sought as soon as was practicable. All disputes were to be settled by an appointed arbitration committee and all profits in excess of 10% were to be

divided equally among the shareholders.⁷⁰

Success depended on widening the share ownership so that the initial capital could be raised, and on devising some mechanism for retaining absolute control. An appeal to the entire cooperative membership met with a ready response and, once the legal obstacles had been overcome, there was no shortage of willing investors. Strong links had been forged between local trade unionists and cooperators as a result of their joint involvement in Cowen's Northern Reform Union and Northern Reform League. Essentially, by 1871, many societies regarded their backing of the Ouseburn Works as little short of a moral obligation. Cowen's Chronicle gave unequivocal endorsement of the scheme throughout July and August, assiduously publicising the take up of shares and the numerous promotional meetings at which League members such as McKendrick affirmed it to be "the most important movement ever started on Tyneside".⁷¹ The Wallsend Society became the first of many to respond to McKendrick's promise that the "strike epidemic" gripping England would disappear if industry was remodelled on cooperative lines.⁷² By then, most societies had accrued substantial revenue and the Blaydon Society required little persuasion to part with £1,000 of their capital for, as William Douglas (Treasurer) pointed out, they were simply required to risk half the usual dividend for one quarter of the year. Given that in doing so they were helping the engineers as well as promoting cooperative principles, many believed they were "in honour and duty bound" to contribute.⁷³ Apart from the pledges of local cooperatives, large sums of money were also forthcoming from Yorkshire and the C.W.S. and the success of the venture seemed to be assured. With the strike still underway there was no shortage of work, and in a heady atmosphere of supreme confidence the planned arbitration board was declared superfluous to an industry with a cooperative management structure.⁷⁴ In the immediate

aftermath of the strike, Cowen applauded their endeavours which he said had "contributed materially to promote that great social victory which had just been achieved".⁷⁵

Rutherford's popularity was formally affirmed when the entire workforce marched in unison to pledge their votes for him in the municipal elections⁷⁶, and even when the works collapsed in 1875 his standing with the Tyneside people remained untainted by the bitter recriminations which followed. Notwithstanding the enormous losses sustained by almost all societies and the the two miners' unions who had been encouraged to deposit their funds with the Industrial Bank(floated in 1873 to provide additional financial support), Rutherford was exonerated of blame. He retained the unwavering loyalty that Alex Scorer had pledged at the height of the Ouseburn's success:

For we think,think,sweat,broil
Fra buzzor unto bell
But what gis plishur te wor toil
Pairt profit's for worsell!
.....
Say! mun we leev the Doctor oot
Wivoot a word o'praise,
That brow't the Yuseburn works aboot,
That did the Cumpnee raise?
No! Let us show the foke outside,
We can his morrits see,
And t'yek him willin' as wor guide
Bi geen him three times three.
For he'll work,think, think, work
Fra mornin'until neet
An not a bit o' bother shirk
Te see the works a' reet.⁷⁷

There can be no doubt that the Ouseburn's ignominious collapse amidst accusations of mismanagement significantly impeded further progress in the sphere of workers cooperatives. Despite earlier optimism, the Ouseburn had been beset by industrial disputes, particularly in relation to the employees compulsory purchase of shares.⁷⁸ Nationally, there were two schools of thought. Prominent cooperators such as E.O.Greening wanted employees to be full partners, whereas

others believed that their overriding aim should be to provide goods "at the cheapest possible price".⁷⁹ There were also justifiable fears that employees would sell their shares to outsiders when they left, and control would no longer be retained by cooperators.⁸⁰ Robert Oakeshott claims that the Duseburn workers were not seriously committed to the project and "they never came to think of it as in any genuine way 'theirs'".⁸¹ Locally, Cooperation was damaged by the experience. The loss of capital not only precipitated falling membership in some societies, but those who remained became extremely wary of other capital ventures.⁸² It is not without significance that Cowen should have studiously avoided any direct involvement in the Duseburn's management, especially as Rutherford had no business acumen or experience. Self preservation, as much as overwork, probably explains his uncharacteristic reticence.

On a more positive note, the expansion of cooperative societies received a powerful boost from an unexpected quarter in 1872. A sudden increase in the price of staple foods sparked off a violent agitation in the North Durham coalfield which carried all the hallmarks of the early nineteenth century food riots.⁸³ The significance of the dispute is not so much that it was managed and controlled from the start by local women. It is the immediacy with which a 'cooperative' solution was arrived at that distinguishes this women's campaign from its forerunners. Employing the language of exploitation they rapidly implemented a boycott and resolved to establish their own cooperatives. Women on Tyneside had been politically active throughout the period, visibly participating in all the local electoral reform initiatives and, more often than not, acting as principal fundraisers for the gamut of radical activities. The solvency of mechanics' institutes, Temperance societies and Cowen's numerous campaigns depended largely upon the regular soirees, festivals and dinners which they organised with considerable expertise.⁸⁴

On this occasion, however, the colliery women seemed determined to demonstrate that they could conduct their own affairs, without any outside interference or assistance. This proved to be no orderly, polite exchange but an aggressive and violent defence of their right to obtain good quality produce at a fair price. Initially, the campaign was treated with a combination of scorn and patronising good humour by the local press. The North of England Farmer, which reported the mass protest meeting at Seaton Colliery, ridiculed the women's unseemly exodus into the nearest public house, the editor's sympathy clearly with the "hundreds of poor fellows" who "emerged from the bowels of the earth to find that no dinner was ready for them".⁸⁵ Undaunted, the women organised a collection to pay off the outstanding debts owed to local butchers and rigorously enforced a total boycott. 'Blacklegs' were summarily punished, often by 'tarring' or forcible stripping to ensure the solidarity and effectiveness of their ban. The railings of a house in Seaton Colliery were torn down and an effigy of the offender burned when she was discovered to have purchased meat from a blacklisted supplier.⁸⁶ Mobile butchers' vans were stoned and lengthy detours had to be made to reach those areas unaffected by the dispute. For all its comic overtones, this was a serious dispute and after the initial hostilities had been declared the women voted to avoid public house meetings - not just to defend themselves from smears that they were enjoying "a drunken spree", but to demonstrate that they regarded publicans as equally exploitive⁸⁷.

The large attendance at all the meetings testifies to the degree of solidarity that was generated, while the decision by Durham butchers to form a union to protect their threatened trade demonstrates that the women's tactics were having considerable impact. High prices were not the only source of grievance. Resentment also festered over the invidious operation of credit schemes and the adulteration of food supplies, for debtors were left in no position to

quibble over prices or quality. The Jarrow contingent, who arranged to have the local milk supply analysed, were incensed when they discovered that it was "mostly water".⁸⁸ Cooperative stores offered a solution to all these grievances and, even though many of them were obliged to sell meat at prices the same or higher than those which had caused the dispute, local butchers were forced to adopt a "ready money policy" in order to compete.⁸⁹ The strike was given sympathetic coverage by the Chronicle which praised the manner in which the campaign had been fought and applauded the women's decision to set up their own cooperatives.

The Women's agitation was mirrored by similar disturbances in Lancashire and London throughout the summer months and the extended publicity served to heighten local interest and instigate a more rigorous analysis of its cause. The London Patriotic Society, meeting at Clerkenwell Green at the end of August, insisted that high meat prices were caused by the existing land and game laws and the provisions of the Contagious Diseases (Cattle) Act - a view that the North of England Farmer swiftly rejected.⁹⁰ Although the agitation was relatively short-lived the local Cooperative movement benefited enormously, not least because it brought cooperation into the domain of isolated colliery villages and raised awareness of its wider commitment to elevate the working classes.

In the early 1870's, with optimism running high, Cowen had good reason to believe that the spread of cooperation in the North would be wholly beneficial. Addressing the Cooperative Congress at Newcastle in 1873 he stressed that cooperative trading was primarily aimed at rescuing "the poorest class of men outside the circle of skilled artisans" who were being ruthlessly exploited by dishonest traders. Temperance and thrift, he insisted, were "personal and not class values".⁹¹ It is clear that the ameliorating effects

of cooperation which, it is often said, diverted the working classes away from radical reform were effectively countered on Tyneside by Cowen.⁹² Local cooperators were not expected to chose either shopkeeping or community building, or identify themselves exclusively with either Owenite or Smilesian philosophy. Cowen offered them an alternative radical philosophy which liberated them from the inherent snares of both

We hope that, not by any violent revolution, but by a gradual, yet sure means, we shall effect a better distribution of the wealth of the country, so as to spread comfort more equitably....
...We mean to preach a higher and better doctrine. We wish the be - all and the end - all of this existence not to be more money or greater material prosperity; we want to make men citizens, we want to preach the doctrine of brotherhood and fellowship -we wish to preach to you a new gospel.⁹³

Under Cowen's careful guidance, cooperation on Tyneside pursued the same ideological objectives that had lain at the heart of local radicalism for generations. The importance of extending land ownership was thus a primary objective and many societies introduced mortgage and lending schemes at preferential rates. The allotment scheme introduced to the Winlaton Institute membership in 1849 had proved enormously successful and, through the pages of the 1873 Cooperative Almanack, Cowen made his views absolutely clear:

...above all, let us unite to be the proprietors of the land in which we live. This is the true end and aim of cooperation. Without it, every other form of union will sooner or later prove a failure.⁹⁴

Wallsend Cooperative Society claimed to be the first society to introduce house building and allotment provisions for its members.⁹⁵ The Society's founder, Robert Douglass, is credited with being the prime mover when thirteen acres of freedold land were acquired in 1868. A working man himself, it is

said that "no phase of applied cooperation had more interest for Mr. Douglass than the development of land and the building of workmens dwellings"⁹⁶ Members were able to rent the garden allotments for a nominal sum(1d per sq.yard p.a.)and the society bought any surplus produce for sale in the store. A large number of houses were built and sold at cost, with the Society advancing up to 80% mortgage and the balance paid off quarterly from the members dividend. The street names reflected the involvement of the committee who fostered the scheme (Douglass, Harrington, Blenkinsop etc.), and the members pride in the movement itself (Provident, Industrial, Artisan etc.) Colliery districts were a little slower to provide working class housing for many of their members were already provided with housing by the coal companies. Even so, similar scemes were gradually introduced during the late 1870's⁹⁷

Educational initiatives, too, were an integral part of the activities of the Northern Union and almost all Societies reserved a portion of their working capital to be used as an Education Fund. In most cases the Fund was used to purchase copies of the Cooperator for circulation among the membership and for the free distribution of the North of England Cooperative Almanack. In addition, some societies introduced penny readings to familiarise their members with "what cooperation was and what it might become".⁹⁸ Although these initiatives were rather low key and some societies had a rather small allocation of capital, they nevertheless contributed to the cohesiveness and uniformity of the local movement. The Almanack in particular, while providing all the usual statistical and social ephemera, was a powerful document for proselytizing Cowen's radical ideas and for pressing home his ambitious plans for the future, a future in which the Cooperative movement was to play a major part:

Much has been accomplished - much more remains to be done. Not by violence but by the force of the moral situation is this to be accomplished. The race is not always with the swift, nor the battle with the strong. Labour on then, and success will surely crown your efforts; Let your watchword be 'Persevere'.⁹⁹

By 1870, the radicalisation of the Tyneside electorate had reached a self conscious maturity, not least because of the power wielded by the Northern Cooperative Union. Educated to push cooperation to its ideological limits, a considerable proportion of its vast membership became inextricably identified with the other main improving organisations, namely Temperance and Trade Unionism.

Temperance had an important role to play in the radicalisation of the Tyneside electorate but unlike mechanics' institutes and cooperatives which, in the course of time, assumed an overt radical identity, the nature of its contribution is somewhat amorphous. For Cowen, who was a lifelong abstainer, the issue was relatively simple. "Sobriety" he said "must precede all moral, mental and political reformation if that reformation is to be real".¹⁰⁰ Cowen was in constant demand as a speaker for the local circuit and, convinced that greater temperance would help to mitigate against the evils of pauperisation which kept the working classes in a state of undesirable dependence, he gave generously of his services. In essence, it was the liberating opportunities that were created as a result of the efforts of Temperance campaigners which ultimately yielded the sober and thrifty mass membership so necessary to the mechanics' institute and Cooperative movements.

Temperance in Newcastle upon Tyne can be traced back to 1830 when the first society was formed, and within a few years it had expanded sufficiently to warrant the establishment of a Northern District Union.¹⁰¹ The emphasis during those early days was firmly on teetotalism¹⁰² and adherents were expected to sign the pledge, abstaining from all alcoholic drinks. When the

agent of the British Temperance League, Thomas Whittaker, visited Newcastle in 1836 enormous crowds of working men turned out to hear him speak. His own working class background clearly served him well as he argued persuasively that their hard earned sixpences would be better spent on steak, potatoes and bread rather than on a quart of ale.¹⁰³ The campaign to spread Temperance in the North East proved enormously successful and by 1840 there were reputedly 20,000 registered teetotallers in Northumberland and Durham.¹⁰⁴ A massive propaganda programme in which thousands of Temperance tracts, newspapers and pamphlets were circulated free had generated much of this support, and the organisers were well aware of the need to maintain steady financial backing if the momentum was not to be lost. The fundraising problem was tackled by the formation of Ladies Committees, who also undertook the organisation of social gatherings aimed at providing 'rational' alternatives to the public house. In the main, the Temperance movement's endless committees enabled women to participate more fully than was usual,¹⁰⁵ although the management remained a male preserve until the British Women's Temperance Association was eventually founded in Newcastle Upon Tyne in 1876.¹⁰⁶ Given the generational spread of the movement's activities, large numbers of women were required to supervise Sunday Schools, choral societies and contingents of The Band of Hope. Moreover, the identified correlation between intemperance and prostitution was an important factor in the decision to include women on visiting committees.

Not everyone was enamoured of the benefits of teetotalism, however, and on Tyneside, as elsewhere, the moderationists fought back claiming that the detrimental effects of alcohol were unproven. Charles Larkin, the renowned local Chartist and political reformer, denounced his opponents as "ignoramuses, wretched quacks and downright rascals" and asserted that teetotal doctrine was "a form of oppression.... to reduce the men of

England to the water and potato diet of Ireland"¹⁰⁷ Enforced teetotalism was not a position to which Cowen could subscribe. While he readily applauded the principle involved which "deserved respect"¹⁰⁸ he had little time for the intolerance with which it became increasingly associated. His Northern Tribune was scathingly critical:

The intolerance and self righteousness of too many temperance apostles and their intemperate exaltation of the pump as the only panacea for the moral, social and political salvation of society, find no favour in our eyes. Those who make a good cause obnoxious, ridiculous to men of understanding deserve to be scourged with the whip of satire.¹⁰⁹

In effect, Cowen was trying to steer Temperance into a more radical mode, to adopt the wider vision of 'self help' promulgated through cooperatives and mechanics' institutes. Questioned pointedly during 1874 election as to whether he would "rob a poor man of his beer", he made it perfectly clear that he "utterly repudiated the doctrine of attempting to make men sober by Act of Parliament".¹¹⁰ As ever, his concern was to empower the people, to give them the right to manage the licensing laws as they saw fit and, ultimately, to uphold the principle of democracy. Legislation aimed at restricting the licensing hours was vigorously opposed by the drink interest who claimed that abolition would cost the exchequer half a million sterling every week if it was carried.¹¹¹ The tactics of the Good Templars, too, came under fire when the first prosecutions were made under the 1872 Act and The North of England Farmer claimed that the entrapment methods used were little short of "contemptible"¹¹²

In order to trace the connections between Temperance and other working class organisations some account must be taken of its religious roots. The religious and moral ethos that overlay the movement's activities and organisational structure was primarily an expression of traditional nonconformity,

drawing strength from a range of dissenting groups among whom the Methodists must be regarded as the senior partners.¹¹³ Testimony For The Million, a pamphlet which recorded the public testimony of working men, demonstrated that admission to the Temperance fraternity often involved a religious as well as a practical conversion.¹¹⁴ And the publication of a revised Douay Catechism listing Temperance as a cardinal virtue constituted a powerful incentive to local Catholics to become abstainers.¹¹⁵ The arguments advanced by several historians¹¹⁶ claiming that Methodism provided an organisational training for working class leaders, and a political language of protest relevant to a range of radical causes, are substantiated by the available local evidence. In the first instance, a powerful case can be made based on the significant crossover of membership and this important point will be fully addressed below, as it impinges upon the associational life of the locality as a whole. Accusations that teetotallers were politically active were frequently levied and this gives a certain credence to the general point that Methodism and, by association, Temperance were conducive to radicalism. Consider this vituperative attack on teetotallers by a local surgeon during a debate at the Literary and Philosophical Society in 1850:

They were the ready agents of violence in Ireland; that in the muddiest pools of Chartism, the Teetotallers were down among the dregs - that they incited the pitmen to the great strike which proved so ruinous; that their missionaries were even now stirring up the men to another great strike...¹¹⁷

T.P.Barkas, a prominent member of the Newcastle Temperance Society, parried the charge by publishing this cleverly worded rejoinder:-

We rejoice...that Mr.Potter has taken such a dirty job in hand as to go down to the muddiest pools of Chartism...we congratulate him on getting up again to tell us that he found Teetotallers down among the dregs.We accept it as a tribute indicative of success....

Hitherto the warrens of political strife have been the beershops, the dark parlours and the dirty taprooms...the nation is no longer to be impelled by pot-valiant, pothouse politicians.

Expressing his pleasure that Teetotalism had "permeated the whole mass of society" Barkas claimed that it was to the movement's credit that

..the pitmen had the good sense to commit the management of their affairs to sober men rather than to beer-muddling drinkers.¹¹⁸

The overt republicanism of certain sections of the Temperance movement simply added fuel to the fire. The Cowenite press had actively championed the cause of Italian emancipation throughout the 50's and 60's and, with Garibaldi cast in the role of popular hero, considerable capital was made of his temperate habits.¹¹⁹ The United Kingdom Alliance agent, Rev. James Wilson, was promoted as the 'Garibaldi of Prohibition' when he attended a Permissive Bill demonstration at Wallsend in 1860,¹²⁰ and the support he attracted suggests that this was an extremely effective tactic. Even Temperance band competitions, it would seem, proved susceptible to the tide of republican fervour that had captured the Tyneside imagination, for all competitors were required to play 'The Garibaldi March' at the Brancepeth Grand Gala in July 1860.¹²¹

Expressions of radicalism, such as those described above, point towards the connections that were being forged with other local organisations. The emphasis upon rational recreation naturally created a close relationship with the mechanics' institute movement. Cowen actively promoted reciprocity in numerous speeches and through the pages of his newspapers, arguing that institutes were "the fitting adjuncts to all temperance societies".¹²² At the same time, the Newcastle Temperance Society were exerting their own considerable local influence to persuade the Council to help finance the Newcastle Mechanics' Institute, instead of spending public money on the annual Race Week festivities which they claimed would merely encourage intemperate behaviour.¹²³ On a practical level, the provision of Temperance insurance schemes and building

societies encouraged the working classes to be thrifty. In 1844, the Newcastle Life Insurance Society offered an income of £40.00p.a at retirement for the price of a daily pint of beer. The society slogan was "Keep your pledge whate'er you do, For if you keep it, Your pledge will keep you".¹²⁴ By 1862, Temperance insurance and building societies had large registered incomes and the influence of the movement had grown proportionately greater.¹²⁵ Public outcry against drink-related corruption clearly fuelled the call for legislation and by 1872 the Chronicle was drawing attention to the potency of the Good Templars who were predicted to have "a great impact upon the national and local elections".¹²⁶

Cooperatives became a primary beneficiary of the growth and spread of Temperance, not least because they operated an embargo on the sale of intoxicating liquor¹²⁷. In colliery villages, Temperance was the vitalizing connection which facilitated the close relationship between the Methodist chapel and cooperative store so often remarked upon. A scan of the constituent branches of the North of England Temperance League and the Northern Cooperative Union reveals that a large proportion of them were located in the same mining communities, thus giving eloquent testimony to the extent to which this relationship may be described as reciprocal.¹²⁸ These links were not confined to the collieries but were also detectable throughout the region as a whole. Nationally, Brian Harrison's analytical table¹²⁹ of the other reforming activities of prominent Teetollers places Cooperation high on the list of ancillary interests. Equally, the groundswell of popular affection for abstainers like Thomas Burt and Dr. Rutherford, who played such a prominent role in local Cooperation, clearly impressed large numbers of the working classes only too eager to emulate the example of those who had so conspicuously served the interests of the Tyneside people. Burt's association with the

anti-vaccination agitation of the early 1870's was well supported by local Temperance campaigners. The campaign was spearheaded by the Cooperative movement,¹³⁰ and sympathy with the underlying issue of civil liberty served to reinforce the common ground between the two groups.

Since the Temperance movement was expressly committed to encourage sobriety by providing rational recreation this, initially, brought them into conflict with the friendly societies which were almost always located in public houses. With an estimated four million members, and a revenue of more than £11,000,000¹³¹ in 1874, the friendly societies could claim a far larger working class membership than either the trade union or even Cooperative movement¹³² and yet our knowledge of their activities remains somewhat superficial.¹³³ The origins of friendly societies has been traced back to the early guilds but their later expansion in the nineteenth century was, in some measure, almost certainly a reaction to the threat of pauperisation and the fear of the workhouse generated by the Anatomy Act (1831) and the revised Poor Law(1834).¹³⁴ The main function of such societies was insurance against sickness, accident and death, and the proliferation of registered Burial Societies suggests that the desire to ensure a christian burial for their families loomed very large in the working class consciousness. There are, too, difficulties in precisely distinguishing between friendly societies and freemasonry orders, both of which fulfilled a similar welfare function. Working men's societies seem to have been mainly, though not exclusively, freemasonry orders such as the Oddfellows and the Foresters and greater stress seems to have been placed upon brotherhood and union.¹³⁵

The information to hand regarding local friendly society activities is very sketchy indeed, being almost entirely dependent upon brief press reports of their annual celebrations and the occasional surviving Rule Book.

Interestingly enough, much of what survives of the earlier period relates to the proliferation of women's societies. The organisational expertise and solidarity which such experience engendered may well prove to be a contributing factor in their subsequent participation in other social and political organisations. However, it is worth noting that many female societies had a discriminatory membership policy which excluded the old (i.e. those over age 40 at entry) and those who were judged immoral("must be of good character")¹³⁶. Entry fees, some of which were as high as 3/4d in 1909, and the monthly subscriptions which were bolstered by a complicated system of fines for non-attendance, were clearly prohibitive. The subscription of all societies invariably included a levy for the consumption of ale at the regular meeting and its supply, in large quantities, as part of the death benefit provisions. The Friendly Society of Women(North Shields), for example, provided £7.00 burial expenses and four gallons of ale.¹³⁷

Peter Bailey has highlighted their social function, particularly the annual feasts where large quantities of strong ale were consumed "as part of the birthright of the freeborn Englishman."¹³⁸ In the event, it is hardly surprising that they should become a primary target for the Temperance lobby's reforming zeal and, by mid century, middle class patronage brought many of them into line with the morally improving ethos of the mechanics' institutes. The Cowen family had strong links with the working men's orders. A freemasonry order, The Lodge of Industry, had been established at Winlaton from as early as 1700 and a large proportion of the Crowley workforce became members.¹³⁹ Cowen's brother, John, was also a member, representing the Lodge at the funeral of the renowned local oarsman, James Renforth in 1871. Sir Joseph Cowen was Grand Master of the Sunderland branch of the United Order of Nottingham Oddfellows in 1865 when some 5,000 members attended a celebratory picnic in

the grounds of Stella Hall.¹⁴⁰ The gymnastics and games that dominated the proceedings locate this squarely in the arena of rational recreation and contemporary commentators seem noticeably eager to stress the self help, thrifty and sober principles that the Oddfellows and Foresters purportedly evinced.¹⁴¹ In 1850, the Newcastle Chronicle was at pains to point out that with over 15,000 local members (Northumberland & Durham) the Oddfellows and Foresters were saving the country two million each year in Poor Rates.¹⁴² Cowen himself is listed alongside other prominent politicians such as Mundella and Gladstone as an honorary member of the Loyal Order of Ancient Shepherds¹⁴³. As a numerically influential section of the local community it is not too surprising that he should have taken an interest in their activities or that he should have exerted considerable efforts to ensure their participation in his radical campaigns. Although he acknowledged their welfare provisions, he was much more interested in encouraging them to function as part of the self help network of organisations which were going to make the working classes independent.¹⁴⁴ Cowen and other core activists provided the vital linkage between Temperance and friendly societies, especially after mid century when 'alternative' meeting places became more widely accessible.

Most historians, notably Harold Perkin, have tended to regard friendly societies as apolitical, as yet another instrument of working class amelioration¹⁴⁵, and in the absence of more detailed information about their activities it would be difficult to challenge this view on a general basis. That being said, the available local evidence suggests that an alternative reading of the role of friendly societies is possible provided it is understood within a specifically regional context. Cowen's honorary membership might be considered immaterial but his energetic advocacy of friendly societies is not. The prestigious role allotted to friendly societies during the Northern Reform

League demonstration in 1867 is not commensurate with their presence being token. All the major orders were fully represented: Oddfellows, Free Gardeners, Foresters and Druids.¹⁴⁶ Moreover, a number of the delegates were known radical activists, involved in republicanism, electoral reform and Cooperation. Jonathan Rayne (Free Gardener) and Josiah Thomas (Sons of Temperance Order), for instance, were both former Chartists who were also members of Cowen's Foreign Affairs Committee. Other close friends and fellow radicals who worked closely with Cowen on a number of projects include Thomas Gregson (Ancient Order of Druids) and Richard Reed, secretary of the Northern Reform Union (1858-62) and manager of the Newcastle Daily Chronicle.¹⁴⁷ These men were not ordinary members but were elected to executive positions of their respective lodges (Reed subsequently went on to become Deputy Prov. Grand Mark Master of N/Land & Durham Lodge of Industry) and it is their influence over a large working class membership that is at issue. Their radical affiliations were widely known and it might reasonably be assumed that they would not be elected if their political views differed significantly from that of the 'brotherhood'. Equally, it would be unlikely that men with such progressive political views would not take full advantage of their executive position to try to recruit adherents to the radical cause.

The links between friendly societies and trade unions require little elaboration. During the period following the Combination Acts friendly societies enabled early trade unionists to continue to meet and support each other without falling foul of the law and it was not unusual for such societies to offer financial assistance when their members were involved in a strike.¹⁴⁸ In the North East radical trade unionism was something of a tradition, particularly as it related to mining and heavy engineering. From the heady days of the Miners Association¹⁴⁹ the miners had stood in the vanguard of

every political campaign:

A class of men have taken the lead in the new movement who have ever been ready to give earnest and valuable assistance in the work of popular progress. I mean the miners of the North. The services they have at all times rendered to the cause of the people is well known to those who have had charge in this district of former agitations for the enlargement of the franchise.¹⁵⁰

The encouragement towards greater self reliance that Cowen had fostered in all the local improving organisations may be said to have found its ultimate expression in the confident local trade unionism which emerged in the 1870's. Trade unionism was demonstrably not an isolated activity but one which had intimate reciprocal relations with Cooperation, Temperance and mechanics' institutes. Their aims were not wholly confined to the exigencies of their own working conditions and practices. Local trade unionism also embraced the need to improve the condition of the working classes as a whole, to press for more leisure time, wider access to education and more equitable political representation. The complexity of trade union activity cannot be traced in any detail here. Rather, specific examples will be used to demonstrate their growing confidence in pursuit of unusually ambitious objectives.

The pivotal importance of the Nine Hours Strike (1871) has already been referred to as the context in which cooperative production was developed. This dispute, however, exerted an impact far beyond the immediate locality and that of the engineering trades. With somewhat exaggerated enthusiasm, Cowen congratulated the engineers:

The struggle in which they had been engaged was a great social conflict, and one in the issue of which the moral, social and political welfare, not only of themselves, but of the artisans of the whole world, was advanced.¹⁵¹

From the outset, the dispute was publicised as an important test case, not

just of the legitimacy of their claim to shorter hours but of the right to have that claim judged by impartial arbitration. As Matthew Gillender told the Hartlepool working men, they would easily obtain the same conditions if the Tyneside strike was successful. The League, he said, would have the satisfaction of leaving the world "in a vastly better condition than that which they found it".¹⁵²

Arbitration had been mooted in Cowen's Northern Tribune as early as 1854 as a solution for the widespread disputes and strikes which caused such hardship. Samuel Kydd, the author of an article 'Strikes and Arbitration Considered', argued that it was wrong "to suppose that the employer and labourer can have, reasonably, opposing interests" and, calling upon parliament to legislate for Courts of Arbitration, he challenged the Liberal laissez-faire dogma: "Every session proves that parliament cannot reduce to practice the abstract dogma of universal non-interference...Facts often contradict theories".¹⁵³ An Arbitration Court set up to resolve a shipbuilding dispute in Sunderland, with equal representation of the Shipbuilders' Society and the Shipwrights' Union, chaired by three impartial adjudicators, was cited as a model that might be successfully adopted by other trades.¹⁵⁴ By the end of the 1850's the local press began to reflect the growing sea change in labour relations which accepted the need for equity. The Newcastle Guardian, for example, asserted that employers and workers had equal rights.¹⁵⁵ Change was however, slow and piecemeal despite the conciliatory stance adopted by many enlightened employers such as A.J. Mundella, whose settlement of the Nottingham hosiery dispute in the early 60's had done so much to legitimize the wider use of arbitration boards.¹⁵⁶

Cowen was actively involved in the management of the strike from the beginning. The Newcastle Daily Chronicle gave the dispute generous and

sympathetic coverage and was instrumental in mobilising local opinion. He also helped financially in the latter stages of the strike when funds began to run perilously low. But Cowen's most crucial intervention was conducted behind the scenes as he attempted several times to mediate on the League's behalf. The entrenched employers refused to negotiate and instead attempted to break the strike by importing foreign workers from Germany, France and Belgium. Once again, Cowen intervened. The foreign workmen were quickly familiarised with the cause of the dispute and they were offered an assisted passage home. By September, attitudes had noticeably hardened and the Chronicle had begun a concerted assault upon the employers:

They have set class against class and created a bitter spirit among workmen which we are afraid will not easily be assuaged.¹⁵⁷

As reports of widespread intimidation began to filter through, and Black Hawthorn and Company prosecuted twelve men for breach of contract, the Chronicle claimed that the employers were "precipitating social war -

...These are days in which neither gold nor caste is any longer omnipotent. The people of England will never permit a petted and pampered plutocracy to rob labour of its rights.¹⁵⁸

Largely as a result of the League's fundraising tour, the campaign had by this stage attracted considerable outside interest. Meanwhile, Cowen had enlisted the help of his old Chartist friend, Thomas Cooper, and persuaded him to prevail upon Mundella (who by this stage had a considerable reputation as an effective arbiter of industrial disputes) to assist.

Cooper wrote to Mundella and urged him to travel to Newcastle under the guise of investigating the practicability of arbitration. Cowen, it seems, had already warned Cooper that the employers would not negotiate with anyone who was acting on the League's behalf.¹⁵⁹ Cowen acted as principal

tactician, smoothing Mundella's approach to Sir William Armstrong by suggesting the terms most likely to succeed, and preparing the workers in advance for the proposals most likely to be agreed. Mundella was urged to rely on Cowen's judgement throughout:

Mr Cowen is the best friend the men have....he is the most popular man in canny Newcastle and is always the same man. You may confide in him thoroughly.¹⁶⁰

Mundella was dismayed by the hostile atmosphere that prevailed and concluded privately that "the masters are all in the wrong". He was less than sanguine about the possibility of a settlement and, in the event, the employers rejected his proposal for a board of arbitration. It was left to Cowen and Ralph Philipson, the Town Clerk, to build upon the negotiations begun by Mundella and finally effect a settlement satisfactory to all concerned.¹⁶¹

Events on Tyneside prompted similar demands to be made and met elsewhere in the country while, nationally, the Amalgamated Society of Engineers paid fulsome tribute to the League "and the manly, honourable and disinterested part played by Joseph Cowen and the Newcastle Chronicle".¹⁶² At the demonstration and soiree held to celebrate their success John Burnett urged upon the audience the importance of encouraging as many as possible to join the union. Cowen, as ever, grasped the opportunity to press home the political realities. They had, he said, "learned the value and necessity of organisation", now they must organise "not just for trade but for social and political purposes".¹⁶³ The clamour for the nine hours became the clarion call of virtually all trades but in the North East, unpredictably, it prompted an immediate response from the Northumberland agricultural workers.

With average wages among local agricultural labourers significantly higher (over 50%) than those in other rural areas, the primary impetus of the

dispute was not economic but focused sharply on the bondage system and the demand for equitable working conditions. Beginning at Earsdon in early February, the agitation quickly swept through the surrounding areas. Coincidentally, a similar agitation had begun in South Warwickshire by Joseph Arch. The North of England Farmer deplored the way the agricultural labourers had "become infected" by the Nine Hour agitation when they had so little cause to complain, although it was prepared to concede that the bondage system was anomalous and should be given up.¹⁶⁴ The Newcastle Daily Chronicle, though, insisted that

No one with an English heart in his bosom can refrain from giving God-speed to the effort now being put forward by and on behalf of men who spend their whole lives in semi-starvation, in practical serfdom and on the verge of utter destitution. If only for the sake of furthering the laudable endeavours of poverty stricken farm servants in the South, the Northern Peasantry should persevere in their attempts to improve their own condition.¹⁶⁵

Once again, it seems, local workers were being asked to lead the fight for reform. The labourers' claims were vigorously resisted, amid accusations that they were idle and intemperate, prompting the Chronicle to warn that the agricultural workers had public opinion on their side.¹⁶⁶ The Cowenite press highlighted the plight of female agricultural workers and conducted a rigorous analysis of the bondage system during the weeks leading up to the annual hirings at which the labourers hoped to successfully press their case. Moreover, the strength of Arch's campaign was relentlessly exploited as the Chronicle sought to buttress their bargaining position. The new Union, claimed the editor, had "noble work to do which nothing else could do so well"; it would be a school of self help.¹⁶⁷ In the event, the agricultural labourers were able to wrest considerable improvements from their employers on pay, hours and holidays at the Hexham and Longbenton hirings.

As the above examples show, trade unionists on Tyneside were able to bargain effectively and confidently by the 1870's. Their ability to stand firm and obtain significant concessions is directly related to the political cohesion that had been fostered through the plethora of working class organisations, encouraging greater individual self esteem and collective responsibility. Thomas Burt's election in 1874, marked a significant turning point, not just for the miners whom he represented, but for the Tyneside working classes as a whole; with militant democracy as the ultimate aim of radical politics, this was the realization of a dream, a reaffirmation of the 'rights of man'. Cowen had, in no small measure, provided the means, the rest was up to them:

I am sorry that,as matters now stand,the only body of men that are not represented in Parliament are the artisan class; but if the working men want that changed,they know how to do it. You have the power,gentlemen;you can soon settle the business for yourselves.¹⁶⁸

The personal campaign by which Cowen stamped local politics in his own image would scarcely have been possible if he had not been able to rely upon a network of committed and loyal activists. Mostly working men, they maintained and strengthened Cowen's contact with all the diverse groups and organisations, and provided intimate knowledge of their needs and concerns. Cowen's ability to juggle the demands of business with an active and energetic involvement in local, national and international politics depended heavily upon the careful selection and placement of key personnel. A list of core activists (fig.1) has been appended. Each played a prominent part in the reform campaigns of 1867 and / or 1873 and, apart from James Birkett, they were actively involved in at least one of the identified 'improving' organisations. More than half served as cooperative delegates and almost the same

PRIMARY RADICAL NETWORK

	NRL	COOP	TEMP	FS	MI
JAMES BIRKETT	*				
JOHN BENNETT	*	*		*	
THOMAS BURT	*	*	*		
RALPH CURRY	*	*			
WILLIAM COOK	*		*		
JOHN CHARLTON	*	*	*		*
GEORGE DOUGLASS	*			*	
JOHN DAGLISH	*	*		*	
THOMAS GREGSON	*	*		*	
WILLIAM HUNTER	*	*			*
WILLIAM HOWE	*			*	
THOMAS HERDMAN	*		*		
JOHN LUCAS	*	*			*
JAMES McKENDRICK	*	*			*
JONATHAN RAYNE	*			*	
RICHARD B. REED	*			*	*
DR. RUTHERFORD	*	*	*		
ROBERT SUTHERLAND	*				*
JOSEPH THOMPSON	*	*		*	
JOSIAH THOMAS	*	*			
JAMES WATSON	*	*			

Note: involvement in the Northern Reform League has been taken as a base line and * represents their other principal 'improving' activities.

KEY:

FS FRIENDLY SOCIETY
MI MECHANICS INSTITUTE

Fig.1

number were members of 'freemasonry' orders. The percentage who were identified with Temperance and mechanics' institutes was comparatively less but still sufficient to maintain a strong radical voice within those movements. Fig.1, of course, provides only a partial glimpse into the activities of the core radicals. Several (Gregson, Hunter, Rayne, Reed, Thomas and Watson) were members of Cowen's Foreign Affairs Committee, the Newcastle and Gateshead Republican Club (Hunter, Rutherford and Thompson), the Northern Reform Union (Curry, Cook, Gregson, Hunter, Rayne, Reed, Sutherland, Thompson, Thomas and Watson) and the abolition movement (Rutherford, Gregson, Watson, Thomas, Curry and Herdman). The precision with which radical demonstrations were coordinated was greatly facilitated by the existence of the core network and their ability to identify and contact key members of all sympathetic groups. The Northern Reform Union offices in Grainger St. acted as operational headquarters for the Northern Cooperative Union and, in the circumstances, it is not surprising that so many NRU Council members served as delegates for the N.C.U.

The identification of core members of Cowen's radical network was relatively straightforward. They were all active over a considerable period and became well known on their own account. Tracing the ancillary interests of lesser activists across such large organisations, on the other hand, is something of a minefield. Incorrect spellings of surnames, the use of familiar rather than given christian names, and the prevalence of common surnames (Robson, Ramsey, Thompson etc.) all render it difficult to arrive at any precise statistical analysis. No account can be given of Cooperative delegates who may well have been 'ordinary' members of any or all of the organisations analysed by the study. The appended membership lists identify ancillary interests only where the member concerned acted in an executive capacity, and does not claim to offer more than a very rudimentary appraisal of the network.

There is also a need to scrutinize the lives of individual members as this can often provide a better illustration of how these relationships worked in practice. Elijah Copland, who was the Labour Representation Committee's candidate in 1883, had begun life as an apprentice wood carver. In time he was a prominent member of the NRU, secretary of the Alnwick Cooperative Society, President of the Cabinetmakers' Union, secretary of Alnwick Workingmen's Club, and Chief Ranger of the Ancient Order of Foresters.¹⁶⁹

In 1873 as Cowen stood on the brink of political office, the cohesiveness of the local improving organisations was a tangible force, demonstrable through the effectiveness of the local reform movement and the growing solidarity and strength of local trade unionism. Cowen's radicalism was the gravitational pull which unified the disparate organisations, giving them shared objectives and goals and providing an irresistible moral imperative for the militant democracy he sought to establish. His was an intensely personal campaign and it would be difficult to overstate the extent to which he involved himself in local organisations - social, educational and political. He was already an energetic member of the local council, and coupled with his newspaper and other business interests, it is all the more remarkable that he should still commit himself at every level to so many organisations and campaigns. The 'Popular Lectures For All Classes' which he introduced in 1872 is a case in point. Aimed specifically at "people who were working from day to day for their daily bread", charges were pegged at a nominal rate with lecturers giving their services free of charge. Any profits were to go to the mechanics' institute, the working men's club and the two Temperance public houses. As if this were not enough, he undertook to deliver some of the lectures himself.¹⁷⁰

Cowen's political ambitions were, of course, a powerful incentive.

He knew that success depended upon his ability to capture the allegiance of the working classes and that public speeches alone, however stirring they might be, would not suffice. He had to prove himself on their terms, and convince the Tyneside people that they, and not him, were the arbiters of power. By sponsoring working class control of their own organisations, his intervention was not just welcomed but positively encouraged. If Cowen's leadership can be defined in terms of charisma, and all the indications suggest that it should be, then this is its source. There was no need for Cowen to canvass for support, or to explain his radicalism to the Tyneside electorate in 1873. By then, he had repeatedly proven his worth and the required 'act of recognition' which Weber states is born of "distress and enthusiasm"¹⁷¹ had already taken place. Moreover, the Cowenite press enabled him to extend that influence, in a personal way, far beyond what would have normally been possible.

Cowen's vision of establishing a militant democracy was only partly fulfilled and, as it failed to materialise, he began to distance himself from the organisations which, he believed, had betrayed the principles he had tried to inculcate. By 1883, he declared himself "completely out of the temperance agitation", stating that he had "never had a good opinion of the teetotal people";¹⁷² although he supported their aspirations, he "distrusted many of their methods".¹⁷³ The failings of local Cooperation were singled out for particularly harsh criticism. Dissension amongst the Blaydon members in 1868, which resulted in the formation of a rival store (Blaydon Working Men's Coop) had proved galling to Cowen who regarded his local store as the flagship of Northeastern Cooperation.¹⁷⁴ The management had been accused of laxity when fixed stock had to be depreciated at 5%, and in the ensuing row several members withdrew. With a mere 194 members (1872) it never seriously undermined

the trade of the original store, which had a membership of 1774 and assets of £16,221,¹⁷⁵ but it remained a source of singular embarrassment to Cowen. More generally, there were hostile criticisms in the Newcastle Weekly Chronicle which drew attention to the poor working conditions of cooperative employees, whose "hands and feet have been almost worn to the bone"- and this at a time when stores were reputedly enjoying "roaring and profitable trade".¹⁷⁶ The dividend, it was suggested, should be extended to those who had secured the profits and wages should be brought in line with those of other trade unionists. Despite Cowen's efforts the insistent insularity of some societies prevailed and it was the vexed question of inequitable working practices which finally led him to sever his connection with the Movement in 1891:

...of all the meanness in God's creation, the modern cooperator is the worst living embodiment. I know of things done and being done in the North here, of dishonest dealings, of underpaying, of sweating the life's blood out of the unemployed, of a wanting of the littlest of the doctrines of honest commercialism, that makes one despair of the success of great schemes over the baseness of human schemes.¹⁷⁷

Even local trade unionism, he believed, had let him down by succumbing to the blandishments of the Liberal caucus. In the mid '80's the Northumberland and Durham miners' unions backing for Morley and Liberal politics brought him into direct confrontation with the very group which had had been his most loyal supporters.¹⁷⁸ His resignation as a long serving Trustee of the Durham Miners Association in 1886¹⁷⁹ coincided with his exodus from national politics. At the same time, he gradually relinquished most, if not all, of his earlier links with local working class organisations which had previously been the source of so much personal and political gratification.

RADICAL NETWORK.

NORTHERN REFORM LEAGUE:

G.L. ATKINSON 73
JAMES BIRKETT 73 & 67
THOMAS BURT 73 & 67
R. BENSON 67
JOHN BENNETT 67 COOP/ODDFELLOWS
JOSEPH BRODIE 67
ROBERT BRODIE 67
RALPH CURRY 67/NRU/COOP
RALPH CARR 67
HENRY CATHRALL 67
JOHN CRUICKSHANKS 67
WILLIAM CRAWFORD 73
MATTHEW CHALDER 67/ DRUIDS F.S.
WILLIAM COOK 67/TEMP/FAC/CH/NPU
JAMES CAMPBELL 67
JOHN CHARLTON 67 /COOP/MI/TEMP
J. CUMMINGS 67
ELIJAH COPLAND 67/COOP/TU/AOF
GEORGE DOUGLASS 67/ ODDFELLOWS
JOHN DAGLISH 67/ AOF
J. DAVY 67
JESSE DEXTER 67
G DEXTER 67
ROBERT EASTON 67
ROBERT ELLIOTT 73
A. ELLIOTT 67
JOHN FOREMAN 73
THOMAS FULTON 67
THOMAS GLASSEY 73
THOMAS GREGSON 73/ NRU/REP/CH/FAC
M. GRAY
J.T. GILMOUR 67/ NRU/FAC/REP
GEORGE HILL 67
JOHN HINDE 67
WILLIAM HOPE 67
WILLIAM J HOWE 67/ AOO/TEMP
THOMAS HOWE 67
WILLIAM HUNTER 67 NRU/FAC/COOP/MI/TU
THOMAS HERDMAN 67/TEMP/FAC
WILLIAM HOPPER 67
THOMAS HUDSON 67
JOHN LUCAS 73
WILLIAM LAWSON 67
JAMES MCKENDRICK 73/COOP/MI/TU
WILLIAM MAUGHAN 67

MATTHEW PLETTS 73 REP/TU
JOHN PRITCHARD 73
WILLIAM PURVIS 67 /LAB REP.L
ROBERT ROBSON 67/TEMP
JOSEPH ROBINSON 67

TEMPERANCE(1859):

WM. AUSTIN
GEORGE BOISTON
J. BLUMER
DAVID BURN
CHARLES BELL
ROBERT BELL
T.P. BARKAS

JABEZ BRIDGES NRU
THOMAS BOTTOM
REV. J. BROADBENT
GEORGE CHARLTON FLS
WILLIAM CODD

WILLIAM COOK
JOHN CHARLTON
ROBERT COCHRANE

REV. J. C. CALLOWAY
JOHN DUNNING
JAMES DAVISON
W. DAVIES
GEORGE DODDS
GEORGE CURRY

THOMAS FURNESS

THOMAS GOWLAND
THOMAS HERDMAN FAC
THOMAS HUTCHINSON

W.G. HAWDON
J. HARRISON
JOHN HORSLEY
RICHARD HIND

WILLIAM HOWE
WILLIAM ILLEY
WILLIAM JOHNSON REP
WILLIAM LAPSLEY
J. LISLE
E. LEWIS
THOMAS MORGAN
A. OLIVER FLS
JONATHAN PRIESTLEY
JONATHAN PRIESTMAN FLS
JOSHUA PATTISON
ROBERT ROBSON
JAMES REWCASTLE

JAMES RITCHIE 73/67	
JOHN.ROBINSON 67	A.F.ROBINSON
J.C.ROBSON 67	R.ROBINSON
JOHN RAYNE 67/ FAC/REP/CH/FREE G.	JOSHUA RITSON
THOMAS RAMSAY 67	JOSHUA REAY
RICHARD BAGNALL REED NRU/FAC/MI/FS	
J.SYMES 73	R.SWAN
CHARLES SIMPSON 73	JOHN SMITH
ROBERT STAPLETON 73	JOS.SPRAGGON
LUKE SCOTT 67	BROWN SIM
EDWARD SUTHERLAND 67	D.SMITH
A SMITH 67	
ROBERT SUTHERLAND 67 MI/NRU	
ALEX SCORER 67 /73 REP	
H SINCLAIR 67	
JAMES STEVENS 67	
JAMES TROTTER 73	WILLIAM TAYLOR
JOSEPH THOMPSON 73 NRU/ COOP/FREE G./REP	
MARTIN THOMPSON 73	
THOMAS THOMPSON 67 NRU	
R. THOMPSON 67	
HENRY TODD 73	
THOMAS TULIP 67	
JOSIAH THOMAS 67/FAC/NRU/CH/POL/COOP	
G. TWEDDELL 67	THOMAS VEITCH
JAMES WATSON 73 NRU/CH/FAC/POL/FLS	A.WARDROPPER
T.T.WINSHIP 73	C.WILTHEW
THOMAS WILSON 67 FLS	T.WARNE
ROBERT WARDEN 67/ NRU	
T. WRIGHT 67	
RALPH WALTON 67	
RALPH YOUNG 73	R.WILSON
	JOHN WIGHAM

PRES:J.COWEN
 VPs:RUTHERFORD,BURT,BIRKETT,
 LUCAS,ELLIOTT,TROTTER,
 CRAWFORD

PRES:J.COWEN;VP:JAMES REWCASTLE,
 DR.RUTHERFORD

KEY:

CH	CHARTIST
NRU	NORTHERN REFORM LEAGUE
FAC	FOREIGN AFFAIRS COMMITTEE
FLS	FREEHOLD LAND SOCIETY
MI	MECHANICS INSTITUTE
REP	REPUBLICAN CLUB
FS	FRIENDLY SOCIETY
AOF	ANCIENT ORDER OF FORESTERS
FREE G	UNITED ORDER OF FREE GARDENERS
AOO	ANCIENT ORDER OF ODDFELLOWS
73	NORTHERN REFORM LEAGUE CAMPAIGN 1873
POL	POLISH/HUNGARIAN REFUGEE COMMITTEE

FREEMASONS:

ROBERT	ARMSTRONG	Pride of the Tyne Lodge 1867 NRL
EDWARD	ALLSOPP	United Free Gardeners 1867 NRL
GEORGE	ANDERSON	United Order of Oddfellows
	BAILEY	Pride of the Tyne Lodge 1867 NRL
RICHARD	BLAKEY	United Free Gardeners 1867 NRL
JOHN	BENNETT	Grand United Order of Oddfellows 1867 NRL;Coop
GEORGE	BIRKETT	United Free Gardeners
WILLIAM	CHARLTON	United Free Gardeners
JOHN	COATS	United Free Gardeners 1867 NRL
JOSEPH	COWEN Snr.	United Order of Nottingham Oddfellows G.M.1865
JOSEPH	COWEN	Loyal Order of Ancient Shepherds (Hon.Mbr.)
JOHN A.	COWEN	Lodge of Industry No 48
MATTHEW	CHALDER	Druids Friendly Society 1867 NRL
ELIJAH	COPLAND	Ancient Order of Foresters NRU/TU/COOP
JOHN	DAGLISH	Ancient Order of Foresters 1867 NRL
PETER	DICKENSON	Ancient order of Foresters
GEORGE	DOUGLASS	Ancient Order of Oddfellows 1867 NRL
WILLIAM	FORBES	United Free Gardeners
THOMAS	GREGSON	Ancient Order Of Druids CH/NRU/NRL/73/REP/FAC/EM/I/COOP
WILLIAM	GUTHRIE	Ancient Order of Foresters
GEORGE	HAWKS	Ancient Order of Oddfellows
GEORGE	HEDLEY	United Free Gardeners
WILLIAM	J.HOWE	Ancient Order of Oddfellows 1867 NRL
ROBERT	PROCTOR	Ancient Order of Oddfellows
RICHARD	B.REED	Lodge of Industry Dep.G.M.of Durham 1865 NRU/NRL/MI
JOHNATHAN	RAYNE	United Free Gardeners CH/FAC/REP/NRL
THOMAS	ROBSON	Ancient order of Oddfellows
WILLIAM	ROBINSON	Ancient Order of Free Foresters CH/NRL
ROBERT	STUDDY	United Free Gardeners
ISAAC	TEMPLE	Ancient Order of Foresters
JOSEPH	THOMPSON	United Free Gardeners NRU/NRL/COOP
STEPHEN	THOMPSON	United Free Gardeners 1867 NRL
THOMAS	WILSON	Ancient Order of Foresters;NRL;FLS;
ROBERT	WOOD	United Free Gardeners NRU
FRANCIS	WILLIAMSON	United Free Gardeners 1867 NRL

COOPERATIVE ACTIVISTS:1862

Cooperative Conference Delegates:

JOHN BATY/ MI
THOMAS BRINDLEY
WILLIAM BELL
JOSEPH BATES
JOSEPH BELL/ NRU
JOHN BULLERWELL
HAMLET BOOTH
RALPH CURRY/ NPU/CH/NRU/NRL
HENRY CARSE/ NRU
THOMAS CRAIG
GEORGE CARMICHAEL
JOHN CHARLTON/ NRL/MI/TEMP
ELIJAH COPLAND NRU/TU/AOF
SAMUEL COOPER
ANDREW DICKENSON
JOHN DODDS
THOMAS DIXON /NRU
WILLIAM DOUGLASS/MI
JAMES EADIE /MI
THOMAS EDDIE
CHARLES FLINN
BENJAMIN GRICE
THOMAS GRIEVES
THOMAS GREGSON/ NRU/NRL/REP/CH/FAC/EM/I/FS
JOHN GALLOWAY FAC
GEORGE HARKNESS
THOMAS HOGG
DAVID HILL
MICHAEL HUNTER
JOHN HARDY
JAMES KILGOUR MI
JOHN KANE/ CH/TU/NRU/FAC/REF
JOHN LEATHERT
W. LYALL
JOHN McSHANE
ANDREW MORTON
ROBERT NIXON
GEORGE PATTINSON
THOMAS PROCTOR
ROBERT RAMSAY MI/NRU
THOMAS RAE
THOMAS RIPPON
WILLIAM RAMSHAW
T. SPOTTISWOOD
JOHN STEELE
JAMES SCOTT
EDWARD SMITH
HENRY SOULSBY
JOHN SCOTT
JOSIAH THOMAS/ CH/NRU/NRL/FAC/REF/EM/I/FS
ABRAHAM TWELFORD

EDWARD THOMPSON
JOHN THOMPSON/ NRU/NRL
JOHN URWIN
WILLIAM WINTER
GEORGE WILSON
WILLIAM WESTGARTH
JAMES WATSON/ CH/ NRU/NRL/73/FAC/FLS
THOMAS VALLANS/MI

COOPERATIVE DELEGATES 1873

J.ARMITAGE
T.ALLAN
W.AULD
J.AMOS
J.BROWN
W.BLAND
W.BURNIP
R.BOUSFIELD
J.BATEY
J.BROWN
J.BOND
F.BAINBRIDGE
J.BELL
I.BROWN
R.BAXTER
T.BAXTER
T.BLENKINSOP
T.BURT
J.BARKAS
J.CRAWFORD
W.COWARD
J.H.CHAPELOW
W.CAMPBELL
R.CUTHBERTSON
R.W.COLE
W.CURRY
R.COOK
R.CARR
J.CURRY
W.DAVISON
W.DOUGLASS
G.DUNN
J.DIXON
WM.DODDS
J.DODDS
J.DOWNIE
T.DOWSON
J.DAVISON
G.DIXON
R.DOUGLASS
J.EADIE MI
W.ECKFORD
W.ELLIOT
G.EGDELL
J.FORBES
E.FENWICK
T.FENWICK
W.GARDENER
R.GILLENDER
D.GLEDSON
T.HENDERSON
J.HOWE

N.HUTCHINSON
T.HALL
W.HEPPELL
J.HALLIWELL
G.HAILS
T.KEENLEYSIDE
T.JEFFERSON
H.JEMISON
W.LOWTHER
J.LITTLE
E.LAWSON
R.LEWIN
R.LILLEY
W.LYONS
R.LAVERICK
R.LAUDER
J.MELVILLE
T.MOFFAT
D.McGREGOR
J.MASON
R.METCALF
R.MOORHOUSE
J.MAXWELL
J.McKENDRICK
J.McPHERSON
R.NIXON
G.NEWTON
J.PARKIN
T.PEDALTY
G.PATTERSON
S.PEARSON
T.PROCTOR
S.ROBSON
T.ROBSON
J.REED
J.RIPPON
D.REVIE
M.ROBSON
D.RIOCH
J.RICHARDSON
G.RIDLEY
M.RICHARDSON
W.REAY
W.ROBSON
J.RUTTER
J.ROBINSON
H.SOULSBY
A.SCORER
T.SPOTTISWOOD
T.J.SMITH
E.SMITH
S.SANDHAM
T.STEPHENSON
S.STEWART

A.SCOTT
J.SMALL
J.SCOTT
W.C.SMITH
J.STEAD
J.THIRLAWAY
S.THOMPSON
W.THRELFORD
R.THOMPSON
J.TAYLOR
T.THOMPSON
J.WILKINSON
A.WILSON
H.WELSH
J.WILLETT
J.WATSON
Rev.WHEELER
T.WARE
C.WATT
M.M.WARD

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42. Jane Cowen Mss.op.cit; also Cowen Papers D220 4.8.1858
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47. Minute Book of the Northern Union of Mechanics Institutes 1872-1887. Essay Competition 4.10.1879. Thomas Burt was one of the appointed judges and the winning entries were subsequently published in the Newcastle Weekly Chronicle.
48. Northern Tribune Vol.2 D87
49. Jane Cowen Mss.op.cit Chapter14; Cowen Papers D318: Spch to the Annual Meeting of the N.Union of Mechanics Institutes, 17.9.1884; Newcastle Daily Chronicle 12.4.73
50. Cowen Papers B135 & B137; R.Challinor: A NEW HARMONY? (1990) gives a brief account of Robert Owen's visit to Newcastle in 1843.
51. Doubleday was an executive member of the N.P.U. in 1832 and a prominent Chartist.
52. Cowen Papers B137 Spch to Newcastle Cooperative Congress, 12.4.1873.
53. S.Pollard: 'Cooperation: from Community Building to Shopkeeping' pp99-100 in A.Briggs & J.Saville (ed) ESSAYS IN LABOUR HISTORY (1969); also G.D.H.Cole: A CENTURY OF COOPERATION (1944) which is generally regarded as the most comprehensive study of the Cooperative movement available, here p 89
54. Cowen Papers B137 op.cit.
55. Ibid.
56. Jane Cowen Mss. op.cit.
57. Cowen Papers B122 North of England Cooperative Almanack 1873
58. Cowen Papers B41 Northern Cooperative Union Minute Book 11.3. 1862-17.5. 1864. Meetings were held in the Northern Reform Union Office.
59. G.D.H. Cole op.cit.p154; also see N.Todd op.cit.p 107
60. Jane Cowen Mss.op.cit.
61. CRAMLINGTON DISTRICT COOPERATIVE SOCIETY, Jubilee Souvenir 1861-1911 pp27f

62. HANDBOOK of the 26TH ANNUAL COOPERATIVE CONGRESS, Sunderland 1894 p78.
63. Jane Cowen Mss.p43 The deputation told Cowen that they were unwilling to move nearer to their place of work because a)they would no longer qualify for a vote b)they would not be near the Coop store. Cowen successfully negotiated with the Railway authorities on their behalf.
64. E.Allen: THE NORTH EAST ENGINEER'S STRIKE OF 1871 (1971) provides the best account of the background and progress of the strike.
65. Ibid. the merits of producer cooperatives are said to have been ongoing throughout the 60's.p 123
66. N.Todd op.cit. By 1871, there was a Cabinetmakers Society (1867), a Tailoring Cooperative (1871) and a Corn Mill (1868), pp 108-9
67. Dr. J.H. Rutherford was a local educationalist with an active involvement in the Newcastle Mechanics' Institute. He collaborated with Cowen on various reform projects but he is particularly renowned as a prominent cooperator who sponsored the Ouseburn venture. G.D.H.Cole op.cit. gives a good account of his cooperative activities pp163-4. A short biography of Rutherford's life and career can also be found in R.Welford: MEN OF MARK 'TWINN TYNE & TWEED (1892)
68. The mining cooperative, Briggs & Co. were established in Yorkshire in 1865. G.D.H.Cole op.cit. is dismissive of the venture, stating that it was "no more than a profit-sharing arrangement of a singularly unfortunate kind". Its importance lies in that other producer cooperatives, including Ouseburn, adopted the same 10% fixed reserve on capital before any dividend was payable. In 1874 the shareholding arrangements were abandoned following a protracted strike.p160
69. Newcastle Daily Chronicle, Edit. 4.7.1871
70. Newcastle Daily Chronicle. 1.7.1871
71. Newcastle Daily Chronicle 6.7.1871
72. Newcastle Daily Chronicle 7.8.1871
73. Newcastle Daily Chronicle 28.8.1871
74. Newcastle Daily Chronicle 7.10.1871
75. Newcastle Daily Chronicle 8.11.1871
76. Newcastle Daily Chronicle 31.10.1871 Rutherford contested, and won the Elswick seat.
77. Cowen Papers: B122 'The Ouseburn Engine Works' by Alex Scorer was printed in Cooperative Almanack 1873
78. R.Oakeshott: THE CASE FOR WORKER'S COOPERATIVES (1978) gives a brief summary the history of worker's cooperatives and states that Ouseburn was "another false start" p57; also see G.D.H.Cole op.cit. pp 163-167; Benjamin Jones: COOPERATIVE PRODUCTION (1894)
79. H.D.Lloyd: LABOUR COPARTNERSHIP (1899) pp103-7; B.Lancaster: RADICALISM, COOPERATION AND SOCIALISM Leicester Working Class Politics 1860-1906 (1987) Chapter 10, esp. pp137-8; L.Magnanie: 'National Cooperative Festivals' in S.Yeo (Ed) :NEW VIEWS OF COOPERATION (1988), noting that dissent over share holding and partnership created a rift and led to the creation of an 'alternative' Festival, based in the North. pp181-3.
80. Lloyd op.cit. p183 notes that the Hebdon Bridge Fustian Works encountered such problems; Lancaster op.cit. p138.
81. Oakeshott op.cit. p58.
82. N.Todd op.cit. p122
83. Cowen Papers B122 Cooperative Almanack 1873; N.Todd op.cit. gives a detailed account of the Women's agitation; see also M.I.Thomis & J.Grimmett: WOMEN IN PROTEST 1800-1850 (1982) which gives a good appraisal of early 19th century food riots, Chapter 2.

- 84.Newcastle Guardian 1.4.1848 refers to the "unwearied exertions" of the women which kept the mechanics' institute solvent.
- 85.North of England Farmer 15.6.1872
- 86.North of England Farmer 22.6.1872
- 87.Ibid.
- 88.North of England Farmer 6.7.1872
- 89.North of England Farmer 22.7.1872
- 90.North of England Farmer 31.8.1872 The editor asserted that high food prices were a direct result of the shorter working hours that the working classes had agitated for in 1871
- 91.Cowen Papers:B137 Speech to Newcastle Cooperative Congress 13.4.1873
- 92.John Walton:LANCASHIRE,A Social History (1987)states that the Cooperative movement in Lancashire diverted the working classes away from radical reform.pp245-7, although elsewhere in the volume he also points out that cooperatives gave the working classes access to libraries and educational facilities, and overall this effected significant improvements in standards of living p301; see also Harold Perkin:THE ORIGINS OF MODERN BRITISH SOCIETY 1780-1880 (1969)who states that by the 60's the cooperative movement was "an instrument of working class amelioration rather than social revolution".pp384-390
- 93.Cowen Papers:B137 op.cit.
- 94.Ibid.
- 95.Wallsend Industrial Cooperative Society Jubilee Book 1862-1912
- 96.Ibid.
- 97.Cramlington District Cooperative Society Jubilee Souvenir 1861-1911;also Newcastle Daily Chronicle 3.3.1873 which notes the establishment of the Ncle.Industrial Land & Building Society "on cooperative principles".
- 98.Cramlington Souvenir Ibid.
- 99.North of England Cooperative Almanack 1873.
- 100.Cowen Papers:D320 Speech on the Blue Ribbon Movement 19.1.1884.
- 101North of England Temperance League Centenary Handbook 1858-1958 states that the first Newcastle Temperance Society was formed 1.10.1830 and the Northern Union was established by 1836.
- 102.B.Harrison:DRINK AND THE VICTORIANS (1971),Chapter 5 traces the origins of Teetotalism.
- 103.T.W.P.Taylder:THE HISTORY OF THE RISE AND PROGRESS OF TEETOTALISM IN NEWCASTLE (1885);also B. Harrison op.cit stating that Whittaker was a "poor factory lad" pp113f.
- 104.British and Foreign Temperance Intelligencer 1.1.1840.
- 105.P.Hollis:WOMEN IN PUBLIC:The Women's Movement 1850-1900 (1979),Extract from United Kingdom Alliance 4th Report,1856; R.Colls:THE PITMEN OF THE NORTHERN COALFIELD (1987)highlights the role of women in Chartism pp275f.
- 106.Ibid.
- 107.Newcastle Guardian 27.4.1850.
- 108.Cowen Papers:B148 Speech by Cowen at the opening of a Temperance Church Bazaar,North Shields,13.5.1873
- 109.Cowen Papers:D87 Northern Tribune March 1854
- 110.SPEECHES BY JOSEPH COWEN M.P.(1874)published by Northern Reform League: 21.1.1874,Election speech in Newcastle upon Tyne
- 111.North of England Farmer 28.10.1871
- 112.Ibid.31.8.1872
- 113.R.Colls op.cit.p 131
- 114.published as a tract in January 1847.
- 115.Local Tracts:1836.

116. notably R. Moore: PITMEN, PREACHERS & POLITICS (1974) p225.
117. Local Tracts: 'A Defence of Working Men' (1850). According to P. Bailey: LEISURE & CLASS IN VICTORIAN ENGLAND (1978) Chartism was "the dangerous cause uppermost in middle class minds" at that time. P36
118. Local Tracts Ibid.
119. Newcastle Daily Chronicle, 1.6.1859, Spch. at Cramlington, N/Land.
120. Newcastle Daily Chronicle, 10.7.1860.
121. Newcastle Daily Chronicle, 26.7.1860. 'The Garibaldi March' was written by a local man, T.S. Watson.
122. Northern Tribune 1854 report of a speech by Cowen at Newburn, and also a review of the Middlesbrough Temperance movement noted that "the leaders of the Temperance movement are the leading men in the Mechanics".
123. Address of the Newcastle Temperance Society: Newcastle As It Is (1854).
124. T.W.P. Taylder op.cit.
125. North of England Temperance League Register records the annual income of Ncle. Temperance Prov. Ins as £114,000 and the Ncle. Perm. Land & Bdg. Soc. £77,000
126. Newcastle Daily Chronicle: 22.1.1872. Members of the Good Templars were said to be the "better class of temperance reformers".
127. G.D.H. Cole op.cit. p77
128. B. Harrison op.cit. p 174.
129. comparison of the Register of the N. of England Temp. Register and the Cooperative Almanack.
130. Note: The Cooperator was circulated as The Anti-Vaccinator between Jan. 1871 and Dec. 1871. Burt was prosecuted for failing to have his children vaccinated against smallpox. There are numerous newspaper reports of the local campaign in which Temperance activists played a prominent part. For example see The North of England Farmer 21.10.1871.
131. J.M. Baernreither: ENGLISH ASSOCIATIONS OF WORKING MEN (1889) statistics quoted are extracted from the 4th Report of the Royal Commission, 1874. p163
132. H. Perkin op.cit. p381 states that friendly societies had four times more members than the trade unions and twelve times as many members as the cooperatives.
133. P.H.J.H. Gosden: THE FRIENDLY SOCIETIES IN ENGLAND 1815-75 (1961) is the most comprehensive study available.
134. E. Knox: 'The Body Politic, Bodysnatching, The Anatomy Act and The Poor on Tyneside' NORTH EAST LABOUR HISTORY SOCIETY BULLETIN (1990) states that in 1850 there were more than 300 Burial Societies in Newcastle. P31; a general study of the Anatomy Act and its social implications can be found in R. Richardson: DEATH, DISSECTION AND THE DESTITUTE (1988)
135. J.M. Baernreither op.cit., Pp217f
136. Rulebook of the Friendly Societies of Matrons (Newburn) established 15.10.1821.
137. Rulebook of the Friendly Society of Women (North Shields) established 1819.
138. P. Bailey: LEISURE AND CLASS IN VICTORIAN ENGLAND (1978) p 10; H. Cunningham: LEISURE IN THE INDUSTRIAL REVOLUTION (1980) p122
139. HISTORY OF BLAYDON (Winlaton & District L.H. Soc., 1975), p62.
140. Newcastle Daily Chronicle 29.8.1865.
141. J.M. Baernreither op.cit. p225.
142. Newcastle Daily Chronicle 26.7.1850.
143. Loyal Order of Ancient Shepherds (Ashton Unity) Guide & Directory 1887/8
The Order was founded in 1826, headquarters in Lancs. & Yorks., mbship 64,525.

144. Cowen Papers:D320, Speech on the Blue Ribbon Movement 19.1.1884; Newcastle Daily Chronicle 9.6.1870 report of Cowen's speech at a celebratory dinner The Ancient Order of Druids.
145. H.Perkin op.cit.p381f
146. Newcastle Daily Chronicle 9.1.1867; 28.1.1867.
147. R.Whitfield: HISTORY OF THE LODGE OF INDUSTRY, NO.48 (1934) gives a full account of R.B.Reed's executive role in the Lodge and a brief biographical sketch of his political activities, pp50f. The author was Master in 1879.
148. Baernreither op.cit.p 162; G.D.H.Cole & J.Postgate: THE COMMON PEOPLE (1961)p235.
149. R.Challinor & B.Ripley: THE MINERS ASSOCIATION (1968). The recent debate which focuses upon the involvement of miners in Chartism has been appraised in Chapter 2. see R.Church: 'Chartism and the Miners: A Reinterpretation' in LABOUR HISTORY REVIEW Vol. 56, Pt3, 1991
150. Newcastle Weekly Chronicle Edit. 8.2.1873 referring to the 1873 campaign to extend the franchise to the mining districts anomalously excluded in the 1868 Reform Act.
151. Newcastle Weekly Chronicle 6.1.1872
152. Newcastle Daily Chronicle 16.8.1871.
153. Northern Tribune pg 102.: Samuel Kydd was a prominent Chartist
154. Ibid.
155. Newcastle Guardian 13.8.1959; also see K.D.Brown: 'Nonconformity and trade unionism: the Sheffield outrages of 1866', in Biagini & Reid op.cit.p 96 in which he argues that non-conformists employed the radical language of equity and fair play in their discussion of trade unionism.
156. Mundella Papers: The Leader Correspondence. 10.9.1860; W.H.G.Armytage: A.J.MUNDELLA 1825-97 (1951); an appraisal of New Model Employers can be found in R.Harrison: BEFORE THE SOCIALISTS (1965) pp37f; O.R.Ashton: W.E.ADAMS: CHARTIST, RADICAL & JOURNALIST (1991) p 97
157. Newcastle Daily Chronicle 15.9.1871.
158. Newcastle Daily Chronicle 21.9.1871.
159. Mundella Correspondence: Cooper to M 19.9.1871; 20.9.1871.
160. Ibid.
161. E.Allen, J.F.Clarke, N.McCord & D.J.Rowe op.cit.p 173f; N.Todd op.cit.p88
162. Newcastle Daily Chronicle 16.10.1871 notes similar demands being made in Manchester and Leeds; 29.1.1872 notes membership of the A.S.E. increased from 34,805 to 37,840 because of the strike's success.
163. Newcastle Weekly Chronicle 6.1.1872.
164. 2.3.1872.
165. Newcastle Weekly Chronicle Edit. 26.2.1872.
166. Newcastle Daily Chronicle 5.3.1872.
167. Newcastle Daily Chronicle 15.3.1872; 18.3.1872; 27.3.1872; 28.3.1872.
168. Newcastle Daily Chronicle 19.2.1883
169. J.Cowen: Speeches on Public Questions & Political Policy (1874), 3.1.1874.
170. Newcastle Daily Chronicle 3.1.1872; 7.2.1872.
171. H.H.Gerth & C.W.Mills op.cit.p 249
172. Cowen Papers: Letter Cowen to Dr. Lees (Temperance Advocate), 16.3.1883
173. Newcastle Daily Chronicle 19.2.1900
174. Handbook of the Sunderland Cooperative Congress op.cit. gives a brief history of the Blaydon District Cooperative Society and states that the 'breakaway' society collapsed in 1882. A large proportion of the members "returned to the old society very probably in a repentant frame of mind" p77
175. Cowen Papers: B120 Published Returns of Cooperative Societies 1872.

176. 'Gossips Bowl' by Robin Goodfellow : Newcastle Weekly Chronicle 14.1.1871
177. Cowen Papers B392 newspaper cutting(u/k), dated 1891, with a report of a speech on Cooperation by Joseph Cowen.; also see B300 Speech by Cowen to the North of England Commercial Travellers Association, 11.1.1884
178. Cowen Papers Letter Cowen to Thomas Walton 1.5.1885, referring to the impending libel action brought by the D.M.A. against the Chronicle.; N.Todd op.cit.p155; E.F.Biagini: LIBERTY RETRENCHMENT & REFORM (1992) appraises Cowen's relations with the miners' unions p323
179. Ibid.p367.

CHAPTER 4: THE IRISH DIMENSION OF TYNESIDE RADICALISM

This chapter will consider the premise that there is an identifiable relationship between the continued resilience of Tyneside Radicalism and the presence of a large Irish population. Nineteenth century Tyneside politics cannot be fully understood, or indeed adequately explained, without due reference to its Irish roots and influences. In 1861 the North East reputedly had "the fourth highest ratio of Irish to English in England and Wales."¹ On the basis of numerical strength alone, the Irish were bound to have an impact upon local politics. Add to this the unusual degree to which the Irish managed to successfully integrate with the indigenous population, and that influence becomes even more impressive. The Irish who settled in such large numbers in Lancashire, for example, encountered considerable antagonism and hostility.² In varying degrees, prevalent sectarian attitudes undermined the assimilation of the Irish in most, if not all, of the major centres in which they settled. On Tyneside, the local Irish population not only benefited from the relative absence of sectarianism but their political influence far outweighed their designated minority status.

Tyneside Radicalism, as we have already shown, rested firmly upon an established tradition which was firmly underpinned by a strong agrarian and internationalist critique. The currency of these ideas undoubtedly helped to provide the necessary common ground for the emergence of a workable political alliance, capable of serving the interests of both Irish nationalists and local radicals. In a powerful sense, the Irish represented a highly visible test case; a graphic example of the corruption of the political system. But, the special factor on Tyneside was the salutary mediation by three generations of the Cowen family,³ who applied their considerable influence to the fostering

of good anglo-Irish relations. During their terms of office, both Sir Joseph Cowen and his son adopted a distinctively pro-Irish stance. They consistently opposed a succession of Irish Coercion legislation.⁴ More directly, Cowen championed the Irish cause through the pages of his newspapers and Irish issues were given the most extensive coverage. Events such as the nationalist uprisings in the late 1860's, which elsewhere provoked a widespread sectarian backlash, were sensitively reported to ensure that no blame or charge of complicity was lodged against the local Irish.⁵ As a result, the Tyneside Irish willingly pinned their colours to the radical mast. Cowen's positive intervention on their behalf protected local radicalism from the fractures that bedevilled other 'Irish areas'. And, as the usual separation between Irish and English issues virtually disappeared, the cohesiveness of local radical politics, and its long term future, was assured.

Given that much of what follows has been driven by the need to explore the workings of nineteenth century Tyneside politics, any assertions as to the harmonious nature of Anglo-Irish relations should not be misconstrued. These findings are qualified by the limited scope of the study and it is not the intention here to gloss over the social and religious tensions which obviously existed. Nor should they be writ large over North East politics in general. The available evidence suggests that the Irish vote in other North East towns such as Middlesbrough could be extremely unpredictable.⁶ By the same token, however, local radical politics was not a discrete activity but one which had a significant impact upon other areas of working class life. There are reasonable grounds for claiming that ethnic tensions were appreciably mitigated as a result of the political consensus that was reached.

It must be stated, at the outset, that studies of the Irish in Britain have been fraught with difficulties. In the general way, there is as

yet little agreement about definitions or frames of reference. In addition, those who would wish to give precise statistics of Irish involvement in radical activities encounter more specific problems. The surviving records of reform groups or trade unions, for instance, reveal little or nothing about the ethnic origin of their members, and even newspaper reports and court records rarely gave any background information unless it was specifically relevant. Some assumptions can be made where names are recognisably 'Irish' but they can only be, at best, extremely tentative. On the other hand, there are other avenues of research which can prove fruitful, especially where consistency and cumulative effect can be demonstrated. This line of approach appears to be the most appropriate here. Thus, while it may be impossible to give any statistical assessment, their presence and involvement in Chartism and successive reform movements can reliably be deduced from the identification of Irish songs and banners, the deployment of Irish speakers, and the inclusion of Irish issues on the radical agenda.

Most historians accept that the available statistics for nineteenth century Irish immigration have 'severe limitations'.⁷ The 1851 and 1871 censuses, from which most of the information has been derived, is widely acknowledged to be incomplete. While an extensive survey of the Irish-born in the larger towns is available, data for newer urban areas (e.g. Blackburn) is noticeably lacking. Additionally, the narrow focus upon 'Irish-born' residents took no account of second or third generation Irish immigrants and such distortions have to be borne in mind when assessments of Tyneside's Irish community are considered. The 1851 census states that Newcastle had 7,124 Irish-born residents, amounting to 8.1% of the population, and Gateshead just slightly more with 8.6%. These figures can be compared to those for Liverpool (22.3%) and Glasgow (18.2%).⁸ But, for a sizeable proportion of Irish migrants,

Liverpool and Glasgow offered only a temporary refuge;⁹ they frequently moved on to other areas where they had family connections and work was readily available. It might reasonably be claimed, therefore, that this type of 'floating population' was unlikely to register the same political impact as an established community which, in the course of three generations, could build up a complete network of contacts via an array of religious, social and work related organisations. Consequently, the initial impression that the Tyneside Irish population was rather less significant, is offset by the understanding that this was a much more stable and settled community.

R.J. Cooter's careful study of the Irish in Newcastle and County Durham concludes that the majority of Tyneside's Irish originated from the same Irish counties: Mayo and Sligo.¹⁰ In addition, the 'strong County Down leavening' in Newcastle, which Felix Lavery attributes to the intervention of Monsignor Wm. McCartan, offers a glimpse of a local Irish immigrant community which had well established roots by 1871.¹¹ The tendency of the Irish to form residential clusters was as much a feature of Tyneside as it was of Manchester, with its 'Little Ireland' ghetto¹². However, the issue of segregation, implicit in the use of the term ghetto, needs to be carefully examined. While there is little doubt that the vast majority of Irish immigrants were to be found in the most impoverished areas, it would seem that poverty and kinship were the chief determining factors.¹³ On Tyneside, the Sandgate and All Saints wards were predominantly Irish. Residential clusters in and around Gateshead gave the town a ratio of 1:4 in 1871,¹⁴ and in the second half of the nineteenth century, as more work became available in the mining industry, many colliery villages assumed recognisably Irish characteristics. As the Newcastle Daily Chronicle commented in its survey of Ryhope "...you cannot help the result reminding you of Connemara or Tipperary, or other centres of Irish cabin

life"¹⁵. According to Tom Gallagher, Irish residential segregation was a widespread "Victorian form of apartheid"¹⁶. In both Glasgow and Liverpool, the Irish became scapegoats for all the associated social ills: disease, squalor, drunkenness and violent crime. Even cholera became popularly dubbed 'Irish fever'.¹⁷ Anti-Irish hostility in Liverpool was further compounded by the prevalent sectarian divisions which largely determined the location of Irish communities.¹⁸ By comparison, the Tyneside Irish were much more fortunate. Even though the Sandgate was ravaged by cholera in 1847, the Newcastle Medical Report did not attach any blame to the Irish but instead stressed the need for measures to alleviate the overcrowded, insanitary conditions.¹⁹ It was external bodies, such as the Board of Health, which reiterated the prejudicial conclusions reached in Leeds and Manchester²⁰. Moreover, the Tyneside Irish were given access to Poor Relief even though, strictly speaking, they did not satisfy the residential qualifications.²¹

In searching for a satisfactory explanation why local Anglo-Irish relations should be less hostile it would, perhaps, be convenient simply to accept the Newcastle Chronicles' judgement that Tyneside was "famous for its hospitality"²² The issue is, though, altogether more complex. To begin with, Tyneside did not experience the sudden massive influx of Irish immigrants after the famine which created so many of the ethnic tensions elsewhere. Scarcity of work in some areas was a major source of antagonism between the Irish and their host communities. This was particularly the case in cities such as Liverpool which had greater dependence on unskilled labour. On Tyneside, as in Glasgow, the local population was able to monopolise the skilled jobs and, as a result, there was comparatively little friction in the labouring sector.²³ Rapid industrial expansion in the North East provided more room for employment growth and, as a result, the Irish were less likely to be

regarded as a threat by the local workforce. Apart from the usual unskilled jobs in agriculture and building, the Irish found work in the burgeoning Iron industry, where working opportunities were not unduly restricted by established traditions and working practices. Shipbuilding and railway construction became a major source of Irish employment, as did coal mining after mid century. Since many of these jobs could be described as 'high risk', a degree of solidarity with the local workforce might justifiably be assumed. As for the issue of using Irish labour as strike breakers, this has probably been greatly exaggerated. Scottish and Lancashire employers do not seem to have been averse to using Irish labour to discipline and control their workforces, whether in terms of wages, conditions or for the settlement of disputes.²⁴ On Tyneside, though, the use of Irish strike breakers is said to have been 'unusual'. According to Cooter, the 1844 mining strike was an 'exceptional instance'.²⁵ He argues that the number of workers Lord Londonderry transferred from his estates in County Down was far too small to have had a decisive impact upon the dispute. Without the requisite skills, they could hardly have been considered a viable substitute workforce, and as Dorothy Thompson observes, there is a critical distinction to be made between the use of 'local' Irish and 'foreign' Irish labour.²⁶ The threatened use of immigrant labour was another matter entirely, and this seems to have been a fairly regular, and effective, disciplinary ploy.

Irish workers, who were largely unskilled and low paid, were rarely unionised until the second half of the century. Pressure from the Roman Catholic hierarchy, whose policy at the time was to prohibit the membership of secular societies, must also have had some impact.²⁷ Nevertheless, the world of work did offer significant opportunities for immigrants to integrate with the local community. A brief scan of national radical newspapers and journals

reveals a demonstrable commitment to a union of the working classes during the Chartist period. Publicity material was deliberately targeted to reach the Irish people, whose support was considered to be vital if the radical campaign was to have the desired impact. Political circulars and addresses were explicitly headed to inculcate a strong sense of solidarity between all workers and rule out any possibility of the Irish feeling excluded.²⁸ The pages of Henry Hetherington's Poor Man's Guardian gave Irish grievances a thorough airing, particularly through reports of N.U.W.C. meetings which exhibited a marked preoccupation with Irish matters and their relevance to the cause of reform. The general view, as expressed by an Irish working man to the N.U.W.C. was that "...the union of the population of England and Ireland would restore the liberties of both."²⁹

Locally, public displays of solidarity with the Irish at radical demonstrations were something of an established tradition. For example, at the Spital Fields meeting in 1819, Tyneside reformers carried a distinctive banner bearing a wreath of entwined roses, thistles and shamrock. The Spenceans had already used the emblem to great effect in their journal The Shamrock, The Thistle and The Rose, as part of their bid to establish a 'radical mass platform'.³⁰ And, given the local connection with Spence, such initiatives were bound to be influential. The very same banner was pressed into use by the Brassfounders and Brassfinishers Union at the Tyneside Reform League demonstration in 1867. More commonly, a red, blue and green tricolour symbolically conveyed the sense of unity which local radicals were so determined to encourage.³¹ While it may not be possible to state with any degree of accuracy how many Irish people attended such demonstrations, the consistent use of such emblematic devices indicates that numbers were not insignificant. It is important to recognise that political demonstrations were always carefully

orchestrated and rhetoric was not the sole mechanism for expressing solidarity. Banners, songs, poetry - even clothing- all worked by cumulative effect to convey the collective concerns and aspirations of the meeting. In this context, the regular inclusion of Irish songs and airs embodied a profound political message far beyond the apparent innocuity of their lyrics. The massed crowds who gathered to hear Harney speak on Christmas Day in 1838 were not only treated to an impassioned rendition of "Scots wha hae" but also "Sprig of Shillelagh" and a telling quotation from "their sainted Emmett".³² Harney , who introduced himself as "the friend and brother of Irishmen", assured the crowd that the Irish would not be duped by "sham patriots and hireling philanthropists".

Let them put arms into the hands of Irishmen. Let them
land them in England, and the moment they set foot on the soil of
England, that moment would they desert the cause of despotism, and
Daniel O'Connell and his little Queen, and join the real cause of
liberty and the Radical Reformers of England.³³

Feergus O'Connor was a familiar figure at local radical demonstrations and it is certain that his appearances attracted a large body of Irish support. For his part, he clearly relished his visits to Tyneside, marching at the head of the Hibernian Society of Newcastle, Irish nationalist banner aloft "to hear once more the old air of Garry Owen".³⁴ The Tyneside Irish were also well served by local radical leaders such as Charles Larkin and Thomas Ainge Devyr, whose eloquent defence of the Irish cause did so much to engender a climate of friendly cooperation. And it was Irishmen, more often than not, who were to be found at the forefront of the press for physical force Chartism.³⁵ Should any further evidence be required, a sizable Irish participation in demonstrations can be deduced from the prominent role played by ordinary Irish working men. Speakers such as Mr. McKinney, a sail-cloth weaver from Londonderry,

who had met with considerable hostility in a number of places including Sunderland, occupied the same platform as O'Connor.³⁶ And, of course, for every speaker identified as Irish there must have been many others whose Irish roots are indicated by their names and the partisan sentiments they express but who, nevertheless, cannot be formally identified as such without an exhaustive survey of the census returns.

Irish grievances were given equal prominence on the radical agenda for as the North Shields branch of the W.M.A. argued

Long had we groaned beneath the intolerant tyranny of a Tory faction.....and Ireland has equal cause for lament and indignation when she considers their first measure, after being firmly seated in power, was a bill for her coercion;³⁷

The commonly held view was that both communities were suffering at the hands of an unrepresentative government, which had passed a "Murderous New Poor Law of England" and "a Coercion Bill to famishing Ireland".³⁸ "Justice" said William Thomason "never would, never could, be done to Ireland or England till Universal Suffrage became the law of the land."³⁹ The Liberal Whigs, he argued, had conspicuously failed to settle the vexed question of Irish tithes or to reform the Irish Church. In a determined campaign to secure the support of the Irish people, the Northern Political Union authorized a sub-committee to distribute their pamphlets throughout Ireland.⁴⁰ The willingness to sanction such expenditure when resources were so limited is a measure of the importance they attached to Irish initiatives. Irish women, too, were actively encouraged to join the new Female Political Union. Their influence, especially among the young, was readily acknowledged and local radicals such as William Parker and James Ayre were quick to offer their assistance.⁴¹ Ultimately,

efforts to unite the radicals of both communities proved so successful that, as far as the local Tory press was concerned, Chartists and Irish nationalists were regarded in the same light.⁴² John Saville's emphasis upon the new, closer relationship between Chartists and Irish Radicals in 1848 can certainly be verified, as far as the Northern experience is concerned, though it is worth noting that this reflected a steady and consistent strengthening of solidarity rather than any marked shift in attitudes.⁴³ According to the Gateshead Observer, the Chartist Movement was "half Irish" while the Newcastle Journal insisted that the 'traitors' of the 1848 Chartist Trials were "not English...some of the others are Irishmen".⁴⁴

Chapter 2 has appraised the recent debate concerning the involvement of North East miners in Chartism and concluded that their contribution was, in fact, significant.⁴⁵ Naturally, it is the Irish element within mining radicalism that is of interest here. Their unskilled minority status has already been referred to and it is clear that their limited involvement in trade unionism at this stage suggests they contributed more to the mass than to the leadership of Chartism. It is, however, interesting to note the prominent role played by the St Lawrence Colliery. The Colliery, located as it was in the All Saints area of Newcastle might well have included a large Irish contingent.⁴⁶ The establishment of a Reading Room in 1838, connected to the Newcastle W.M.A. suggests that the St. Lawrence colliers' support for the Charter had a rational basis and was not just another expression of Irish emotional energy, as was so often implied. Devyr's Joint Stock Company was aimed mainly at the colliers, with weekly sales in excess of £2,000, and his advocacy of O'Connor's Land Plan must have carried considerable weight among his own countrymen.⁴⁷

The notable difficulties of uncovering Irish involvement in trade union

activity are less formidable after 1850 when their occupational spread becomes more closely identified with mining and other heavy industries. Later reform movements increasingly relied upon the support of the mining communities to provide the necessary numerical strength. From the very outset, Cowen directed the Northern Reform Union campaign towards obtaining the backing of the Northumberland and Durham collieries. The N.R.U. petition, presented in 1859, was signed by "more than half the adult male population" with "Engineers, Smiths, Carpenters and Miners" identified as the "most numerous designations".⁴⁸ In 1866, when the reform campaign began to gather new momentum, it was Cowen's Chronicle-'The Pitman's Bible'-⁴⁹ which stressed the vital link between the Irish cause and the need for electoral reform. Unfortunately, an alliance of Irish and English radical interests was not universally welcomed, and the violent activities of the Fenians did nothing to dispel fears that the League's credibility would be irretrievably damaged. Memories of 1848 were, it seems, still too painful.⁵⁰

The rise of Fenianism in the sixties fuelled popular prejudices, particularly in areas where the Irish presence was so pronounced.⁵¹ In the North East, the Fenians had an unusually large following and, although large numbers were subsequently wooed by the constitutionalists, regional membership of its 'front' organisation, The Irish Republican Brotherhood, was an estimated 6,000 in 1884, as opposed to 3,000 for Scotland and 2,500 for the South East.⁵² Tyneside is said to have been

...honeycombed with Fenians....men spent half the night in dark cellars, planning, organising and getting the stuff- rifles, revolvers, ammunition- all aboard harmless looking boats...⁵³

Throughout the Fenian troubles, The Chronicle protested that the Irish were

sorely provoked and called for the government to abandon their repressive policies and institute effective reform of the Church and the Land.⁵⁴ Prompt condemnations of Fenian violence were always supplemented by a rigorous analysis of Irish grievances:

About two grievances no man in this age can be ignorant-
the Church and the Land...Fenianism is no more than the sign
and fruit of existing wrongs. ...Whoever would deal successful
with Ireland must grapple with the land question. The condition
of Ireland, say what else we like of it, is a disgrace to English
Statesmanship.⁵⁵

Despite Tyneside's reputation as a prominent centre of Fenianism, there were no major incidents in the locality, and this clearly contributed to the continuance of political harmony. The one notable incident, a riot of three hundred Irishmen on the Town Moor during Race Week in 1866, was denounced as Fenian but it has been suggested that this was probably just scaremongering by the police and the courts.⁵⁶ Racegoers were, it seems, challenged to declare their allegiance for "Garibaldi or the Pope", and violently assaulted with a shillelagh if they gave the wrong answer. In the event, the disturbance had remarkably little impact. As for the rioters, they could hardly have chosen a more contentious issue upon which to make their stand. Garibaldi was something of a folk hero to the Tynesiders, especially following his visit in 1854, and the Italian cause had assumed central importance in local radical circles, not least because he was a personal friend and confidant of Cowen. The Garibaldi Testimonial Committee, originally formed to coordinate the Italian patriot's visit in 1864 had, by then, gradually evolved as the core membership of the Northern Reform League.⁵⁷ In the event, an attack on Garibaldi could easily be misconstrued. For their part, the Tyneside Irish were predominantly

Catholic and, as such, their loyalties were bound to be sharply divided. It is, then, all the more intriguing that the Chronicle should continue to exhibit a markedly partisan stance in their reporting of the event. In 1860, The Chronicle had actually coordinated a recruitment drive for a volunteer force to assist Garibaldi's campaign. And yet, the Chronicle questioned whether the sixteen accused were, in fact, Fenians at all. The evidence, they claimed, was "rather circumstantial"⁵⁸ Even the Newcastle Courant, who described the rioters as "fools from America", seemed eager to exonerate the local Irish from blame.⁵⁹ The Chronicle's sympathetic Editorial argued that the "unfortunate men" who "presented a peculiarly forlorn and woeworn spectacle" had been "nearly quite as much sinned against as sinning".⁶⁰ Lack of education was said to be the root cause of their intemperate behaviour. As ever, Cowen's guiding hand is clearly detectable in the Chronicle's pro-Irish policy. At a crucial juncture, when Anglo-Irish relations could so easily have been permanently soured, positive intervention by the Cowenite Press preserved the vital unity of Tyneside Radicalism, and protected the local community from the worst excesses of sectarianism.

Other 'Irish areas' were not so fortunate and outbreaks of anti-Catholic violence occurred with seemingly monotonous regularity throughout the 1850's and 60's. In Lancashire, where membership of the Orange Order was particularly high, sectarian tensions reached a high point during the Murphy Riots of 1867-71.⁶¹ In his role as agent for the Protestant Electoral Union, William Murphy toured a number of English towns, lecturing provocatively upon the evils of Popery and the sexual depravity of Catholic nuns and priests. Strictly speaking, underlying religious tensions were not solely responsible for the virulent Murphyism which divided communities as far afield as Birmingham, Wolverhampton, Plymouth and Merthyr. As Roger Swift observes, the riots

reflected "deeper ethnic, economic and political strains."⁶² It was towns such as Birmingham, Ashton-Under-Lyne and Oldham, where active Fenianism seemed to pose a serious threat to public order, which proved to be the ideal breeding grounds for Murphy's distinctive brand of bigotry.⁶³ Newcastle was, though, singularly unaffected by Murphyism save for an isolated disturbance. The Chronicle, which carried full reports of Murphy's activities, was moved to declare

It is fortunate for the public peace that there is only one Murphy in England. The brutality and ferocity of that man are something extraordinary.⁶⁴

When he lectured in North Shields the meeting was violently terminated as incensed local Irishmen stormed the hall. The Tyneside Irish Catholics had a stirring defender in Charles Larkin, an old stalwart of the N.P.U., who had published a famous refutation of 'The Awful Disclosures of Maria Monk', ('A Letter to the Protestants of Newcastle') in 1836.⁶⁵ Larkin also actively denounced Fenianism in his regular column in the Newcastle Weekly Chronicle :

Fenianism must be put down. Fenianism will be put down....and its destruction will be the triumph neither of the dungeon nor the gibbet, but of justice alone.⁶⁶

It would seem that, while Tyneside did not escape the attentions of Murphy altogether, he conspicuously failed to engender any long-term sectarian divisions. In part, this may also be attributed to the fact that the Tyneside Irish were predominantly Catholic and Orangeism had only a limited impact in the locality. There were some Orange lodges, of course, most notably at Gateshead, Felling, North Shields and South Shields, but most of the loyalist

activity in the North East was centred in the Consett and Hartlepool area which had a much higher percentage of Ulstermen.⁶⁷ South of the Tyne, sectarian skirmishes were regular though not serious occurrences, whereas the reported confrontation between Tyneside Ribbonmen and Orangemen in 1856 was unusual. Numerically weak, Orangeism on Tyneside was effectively marginalised - so much so that in 1871, the Tyne True Blue Loyal Orangemen of England complained bitterly at their meeting in Gateshead that "their processions were interfered with, while Fenians might do as they liked".⁶⁸

As the Fenian campaign was stepped up throughout 1867, antagonism towards the Irish grew apace. The abortive raid on Chester Castle, the rescue of Fenian prisoners at Manchester and the explosion at Clerkenwell prison, prompted the authorities to arm the police and recruit large numbers of special constables. In the ensuing panic, there were numerous 'sightings' of the Manchester escapees, Kelly and Deasy, and a number of false arrests were made in Durham, Weardale and Hartlepool.⁶⁹ The Chronicle unequivocally condemned the violence of the Fenians but tempered their criticism with a barbed comment that the upper classes were taking advantage of the situation:

We are hearing just a little too much of what is called Fenianism... Fenianism is the scapegoat of every villain in England....even the Manchester crime could not have been committed if the authorities there had attended to their duties....Advantage is taken of the prevailing trepidation to procure the arming of the police.⁷⁰

As a noted centre of organised Fenianism, Newcastle was one of the areas in which special precautionary measures were thought to be necessary. The local police force were armed and several hundred special constables sworn in at North Shields. Fifty revolvers and 1,000 rounds of ammunition were sent to

Sunderland, prompting widespread unrest until the local Council finally conceded that "severe measures are not needed in the North" and returned the weaponry.⁷¹ A decision to station the Headquarters of the Second Battalion of Foot Soldiers in Newcastle was opposed on similar grounds.⁷² The show of force proved to be counter-productive, and the Chronicle mounted a relentless campaign to secure clemency for the Manchester Fenians and establish the unquestionable loyalty of the local Irish.⁷³ A special edition of the Chronicle gave a graphic and lurid account of the executions and called for the abolition of capital punishment to prevent any further miscarriage of justice.⁷⁴ In an unusually forthright editorial, the Chronicle insisted that "The people at all times have the right to revolt against its rulers" and suggested that English Radicals and Irish Catholics could effect constitutional change by peaceful means, if they worked together.⁷⁵

Initiatives towards an alliance of English and Irish Radicals suffered a more serious setback when the loss of life caused by the Clerkenwell explosion was revealed. The Newcastle Journal claimed that the working classes were against the Irish, "...those who work, that is, not those who attend Reform meetings."⁷⁶ For once, even the Chronicle could offer no satisfactory defence and warned

Unless Irishmen are prepared to renounce tactics which are rather the tactics of savagery than civilization, then they must combat alone.⁷⁷

A planned procession in memory of the 'Manchester Martyrs' was subsequently abandoned after the Catholic Bishop of Hexham and Newcastle issued an address to all local Catholics advising against any public display.⁷⁸ Similar 'funerals' arranged in Glasgow, Liverpool and Leeds were prohibited by local magistrates who feared that violent confrontation would result. In a bid to restore public

confidence in the legitimacy of the Irish cause, the Cowenite press published a series of articles. The exemplary behaviour of the local Irish was repeatedly stressed amid demands that the majority should not be made to suffer for the folly of the few...

That there are some members of the Fenian brotherhood in Newcastle upon Tyne does not admit of doubt. But...we cannot believe that there are amongst us any Irishmen with sympathy for the Clerkenwell atrocity.⁷⁹

In London, some Irish working men had lost their jobs in the wave of reprisals that followed. The Chronicle called upon the local Irish to publicly demonstrate their abhorrence of the tragedy and so avoid becoming an easy target for unsympathetic employers. Sir Joseph Cowen lent his considerable weight to the Irish cause at a public meeting convened by the Mayor. English Protestants, he said, would never put up with the intolerant religious legislation to which Irish Catholics had been subjected and he argued forcefully that reform was urgently needed:

The people of England do not wish to govern Ireland as a conquered province but desire, I maintain, to govern it in a spirit of equality.⁸⁰

There can be little doubt that Cowen's press campaign to protect the local Irish was enormously effective. Elsewhere, the Clerkenwell disaster had alienated the Irish from their natural supporters and violent clashes became the norm in places such as Birmingham, Wolverhampton and the Lancashire towns. Even the Newcastle Journal, which insisted throughout that Ireland had always been "as well and fairly governed, and more lightly taxed than Great Britain itself", was disposed to admit that there was no fear of any local unrest.⁸¹

The Fenian disturbances coincided with the resurgence of electoral reform and the Northern Reform League had, from the outset, made Irish reform a central focus of the campaign. At a large open air demonstration, James Watson promised that while the government had consistently failed to alleviate Irish distress, "the vote would change that".⁸² Dr. Rutherford reiterated Watson's pledge in March 1867 when he told the massed crowds at Durham

If working men were admitted to the franchise....they would remedy the wrongs of Ireland (Cheers)-and make the sister country a source of greatness to England.⁸³

The solidarity of the Tyneside Radicals was manifested by the enormous attendance at rallies and demonstrations. An estimated 50,000 people took part in a procession in January 1867, marching behind the official N.R.L. banner which symbolically proclaimed fraternity with the Irish.⁸⁴ Meanwhile, Benjamin Lucraft's statement that the "Fenians were justified in using physical force" had brought to a head the ideological split within the National Reform League.⁸⁵ The Newcastle Journal was stung to enquire "What next? Physical force for the Radicals?"⁸⁶ But, while the Fenian episode caused a good deal of rancour among the National executive, it was never a contentious issue for the local movement. The case for Irish reform had been argued too eloquently; the loyalties of the local Irish firmly established, not least through their participation in radical activities. By the late 60's, the Irish were much more involved in trade union activities, often as delegates of the powerful mining, engineering and shipbuilding trades.⁸⁷ As representatives of large numbers of Irish workers, they could, and did, exert considerable influence.

With the passing of the 1867 Reform Act, the potential of the Irish vote could not be lightly dismissed.⁸⁸ For the first time, politicians

had to take account of the 'Celtic fringe' at election time. In Newcastle, for example, the All Saints ward went to the polls with an electorate increased by 215%.⁸⁹ Sir Joseph Cowen, though, had nothing to fear from an increased Irish vote. As an outspoken defender of Irish interests, who had consistently voted with the Irish lobby in parliament, he was bound to be the preferred candidate of the newly enfranchised Irish. The Irish Church Disestablishment issue which dominated the 1868 Election was, in any case, one with which he had been associated for some time.⁹⁰ Fenianism created sufficient alarm to concentrate political minds upon the Irish problem and in some areas, notably the Lancashire towns, the Tory Party clearly gained from the concomitant upsurge in sectarianism.⁹¹ Divisions over Education Reform, which greatly undermined the Liberal's popularity in Lancashire in 1873/4, and could so easily have had a similar detrimental impact upon Tyneside, was cleverly sidestepped by Cowen's decision to play the 'non-sectarian' card. Liberal Education policy was thus able to appeal to the widest possible electorate and most, if not all, Irish Catholics were kept within the Radical fold.⁹²

The local miners, who had so assiduously supported the campaign for electoral reform, were anomalously excluded from the franchise by the provisions of the 1867 Act because of a distinction made between borough and county qualifications. The Northern Reform League was subsequently resurrected to press the miners case, with the Cowenite Press playing a key role in coordinating the campaign. A series of articles 'OUR COLLIERY VILLAGES' was published in the Weekly Chronicle between September 1872 and February 1874 in order to generate local support.⁹³ Contemporary historians, such as Richard Fynes, have paid tribute to the solidarity of the Northumberland and Durham miners particularly after the formation of the D.M.A. and the N.M.A.⁹⁴ By 1873, membership of both Unions was virtually comprehensive and obviously a signif-

-ificant percentage were Irish miners. Union membership at this level was a distinct advantage as the campaign for franchise reform began to gather momentum. But, when the Manhood Suffrage Committee met to plan a mass demonstration, the importance of encouraging "all workmen, whether members of trade societies or not" was unanimously agreed.⁹⁵ With Cowen himself acting as Chairman of the Committee, the demonstration was given unprecedented coverage in the Chronicle; the timetable of special trains reserved for demonstrators, the order of procession, and declarations of support were all given prominent space in both papers. In addition, Newcastle and Gateshead Trades Council helped to coordinate arrangements for participation by other organised trades and circulated ballot slips to determine the 'pecking order' of the different groups.⁹⁶ On the day, more than 110 collieries were represented by some 70,000 men and a further 10,000 trade unionists, cooperators and friendly society members brought up the rear in a procession which took some three hours to reach the Town Moor. Two hundred thousand people thronged to the Moor to hear fifty speakers declare that the existing electoral provisions were "Irritating, perplexing and unjust". Presiding over the proceedings, Cowen insisted that

When the Hyde Park railings went down before the uprisen democracy of the metropolis, reform was inevitable-and the combined influence and power of 10,000 Tories was unable to stay it. The Bill that they introduced was a most mongrel measure-it was neither fish nor fowl, flesh nor good red herring.The qualification ought to consist, not in the house or the property, but in the man...with an extended Reform Bill we would see the last remnant of feudalism in the shape of the Game Laws swept from the statute book.⁹⁷

A Radical banner of intertwined "oakleaves, rose, shamrock and thistle" was specially commissioned for the occasion to symbolise the unity and strength of the campaign.⁹⁸ Victory, when it came, was made all the sweeter by Thomas

Burt's election in 1874 as the first working class M.P. The local Irish, too, were also setting a new precedent with the election of Bernard McAnulty as a Town Councillor for All Saints ward that same year.⁹⁹

By the early 1870's the new Home Rule movement founded by Isaac Butt was beginning to have a significant impact, redirecting Irish energies towards constitutional initiatives and away from Fenian aggression. John Barry, a prominent Fenian who had lived in the North East from his childhood, played a key role in promoting the establishment of Home Rule Associations in numerous industrial towns throughout Britain.¹⁰⁰ Although Manchester, Birmingham and Glasgow are often regarded as the principal centres of Home Rule activity, arguably much of the organisational initiative emanated from Tyneside.¹⁰¹ Many leading Irish Nationalists were close friends of Cowen. Apart from Barry, Timothy Healy M.P., John Walsh and Joseph Biggar all had local connections which ensured that Tynesiders remained in the forefront of any reform movement. Thriving branches were established in Glasgow as a result of the pioneering activity of John Ferguson, and in Manchester, with Barry acting as secretary of the local association. It is clear that both centres provided England and Scotland with organizational Headquarters¹⁰² However, there are also strong indications that activities on Tyneside were pivotal. A large public meeting in Newcastle Town Hall was convened on the 6th January 1872 and addressed by Professor Galbraith of Dublin and Alex M Sullivan, the editor of The Nation.¹⁰³ Sharing a platform with eighteen local activists, Sullivan expressed his faith in the people of Newcastle and Gateshead:

already he noted signs abroad throughout England of a better, a wiser, and a brighter spirit towards his countrymen. He need go no further than the pages of one of the journals of this town, containing an article upon the Irish question-an article worthy of

the pen and intellect of a scholar - worthy of the heart of a christian and a patriot.¹⁰⁴

Significantly, the first conference of the Home Rule Confederation was held in Newcastle in August 1873 to appoint an executive council and to confirm Butt's presidency. Both Manchester and Birmingham had hosted executive meetings prior to the Newcastle Conference but, while they managed to agree upon an organizational framework for the Confederation, unity between the Fenians and the Home Rulers remained fragile. The I.R.B. Supreme Council was far from convinced that Butt's constitutional initiative would have the desired effect and, therefore, Fenian participation was agreed on a conditional basis only, for a period of three years. After that time, support was to be withdrawn if Ireland had not been granted control of her own domestic affairs.¹⁰⁵ Two hundred delegates attended the Newcastle Conference and sanctioned Butt's proposal to apply electoral pressure during the forthcoming contest.¹⁰⁶ Afterwards, Butt was able to write confidently to Mitchell Henry M.P. "we are wielding a tremendous power here in the North of England and I feel it will tell immensely at an election".¹⁰⁷

Although the primary aim of the Tyneside Home Rule Associations was to secure autonomy for Ireland, their appeal was not narrowly restricted to the local Irish. A large percentage of branches were located in the collieries of Northumberland and Durham, at Bedlington, Hexham, Wylam and Prudhoe, for instance. Supporters were active trade unionists as well as Irish nationalists. The Bedlington branch held their meetings in the Cooperative Hall while the Gateshead Association used the Temperance Hall for their gatherings.¹⁰⁸ This crossover between groups ensured that the Home Rule campaign was not a fringe activity but had a relevance to the wider radical movement. If any further sanction was needed, Cowen's absolute commitment to

Irish reform ultimately determined its centrality to local politics. According to T.P.O'Connor, few Englishmen were prepared "to say a word for the Irish cause" at that time; Cowen was unique in possessing the "political genius" and "reckless courage" required

...to advocate a cause that was regarded with aversion as disloyal, impractical, visionary and perilous. But in Newcastle there happened to be such a man. He was a man who could alone perhaps at the time venture on a course so daring, apparently so quixotic and so impossible. But fortunately Joseph Cowen, who proved to be the man for this great mission, had already begun to work the spell of his eloquence on his own people and on his own city.¹⁰⁹

The Cowenite Press was, of course, the primary instrument of this eloquence. To all intents and purposes, they functioned as bona fide Irish newspapers proving so effective that the United Ireland claimed that "not even the Irish press could have given the Irish cause so strong a sounding board".¹¹⁰ Irish elections, political meetings, eviction statistics and parliamentary divisions were given such extensive coverage as to obviate circulation of a local Irish journal. Charles Diamond's Irish Tribune was not published in Newcastle until 1884, and even then Diamond made a point of approaching Cowen to obtain his backing for the venture.¹¹¹ In terms of integration, sharing the same radical newspaper was bound to have a beneficial effect. All too frequently, in other areas, an unbridgeable 'cultural distance'¹¹² was created as the Irish sought to establish their own group identity. Separate clubs, social groups and especially newspapers were usually perceived by exiles to offer the best means by which they could retain a grip upon their cultural heritage. On Tyneside, the separation between Irish and English social outlets was more apparent than real. St. Patrick's Day celebrations were held in the Town Hall

and, as they became increasingly political, they attracted a broad cross section of Tyneside society. Similarly, the Irish Literary Institute provided facilities for a range of political meetings in addition to contributing to local Irish culture. For their part, the Irish could enjoy an Irish play just as easily at the Tyne Theatre as anywhere else. And, since Cowen's papers were free of any denominational bias, their appeal was broad enough to encompass both Catholic and Protestant groups. As for the government, they clearly considered Cowen's Chronicle to be just as seditious as the rest of the Irish nationalist press. Circulation of the Chronicle to Irish political prisoners inside Kilmainham and elsewhere was firmly vetoed despite an official protest to the Commons by Tim Healey M.P.¹¹³ It has been suggested that the Weekly Chronicle was targeted primarily at the unskilled working classes¹¹⁴ but, arguably, the two papers were complementary. While the Daily concentrated on providing coverage of news and events, the Weekly Chronicle fulfilled the need for a more rigorous analysis of the underlying issues. Popular understanding of Irish affairs was thus significantly enhanced by such items as the biography of Wolfe Tone, published in 1875, sympathetic Editorials written by Adams under his pseudonym 'Ironside', and the inclusion of regular articles by Lloyd Jones.¹¹⁵ Undoubtedly, Cowen's newspapers, which articulated an unwavering allegiance to traditional radical politics, acted as a vital unifying force upon the Tyneside community. Cowenite Radicalism offered a critique of society which diagnosed a common solution to the preoccupations of both English and Irish radicals alike. By stressing collective rather than ethnic goals, local politics provided a rallying point around which all sections of the community could converge.

Land reform and religious equality were the twin pillars of Cowenite Radicalism. From the age of sixteen, when Cowen first began to explore his religious and political beliefs, he insisted that "all have the right to worship God according to their own conscience, which is the common inalienable right of men".¹¹⁶ His commitment to land reform was no less determined and throughout his political career both principles were resolutely advocated. The cause of religious freedom which the N.P.U. and the Chartists had championed continued to be fought through the pages of Cowen's newspapers and from numerous political platforms. Civil and religious liberty, said Cowen, had been the "watchword for English Liberals for more than a century"¹¹⁷ Although greater toleration had been achieved, true equality remained as elusive as ever. The abuses of the Irish Church, commonly identified as a primary cause of the troubles in Ireland, acted as an additional spur to local radicals interested in Church reform. Nationally, discussion of Church questions had come to the fore in the late fifties, prompted mainly by the religious revival which followed publication of the 1851 Census.¹¹⁸ The Liberation Society, which had been in existence since 1844,¹¹⁹ became significantly more influential as it aligned with other radical groups such as the Ballot Society. And, as a result, its members were able to exert considerable pressure over electoral candidates. Liberal success at the polls, to a certain extent, came to depend upon placating the insurgent dissenting lobby.¹²⁰

Tyneside was fertile ground for the work of the Liberation Society. The debate over Church reform had assumed a greater profile during the Fenian troubles as the Chronicle actively sought to shift the blame from the Irish nationalists to the root cause of the problem: "the Church and the Land". The President of the Liberation Society, Carvell Williams, addressed a large meeting in Newcastle on October 31st 1867. It was the Newcastle Branch,

with representatives of all dissenting groups, which first considered the possibility of holding a meeting in Ireland. Williams declared that the time was now ripe to "...transfer their action from English to Irish soil... Ireland would become the first great battlefield on the Church establishment question".¹²¹ The Chronicle praised the initiative of the Liberation Society, noting that the district was "comparatively free from those ecclesiastical annoyances and irritations which our countrymen in less fortunate districts are compelled to endure."¹²² As the debate over disendowment of the Irish Church gathered momentum, the Newcastle Journal adopted a patronising stance, advising the Irish people to put "their faith in the bounty of Providence and the wisdom of Parliament".¹²³ Supporters of disestablishment persisted nevertheless and successive elections became a testimony to their growing strength. Cowen vowed to "vote and speak for religious freedom" during his election campaign in 1873,¹²⁴ and "Civil and Religious Liberty" was adopted as the first principle of the Newcastle Liberal Association. An invitation to Joseph Biggar M.P. to address a Newcastle Liberal demonstration on the subject of disestablishment is indicative of the close working relationship between English and Irish Radicals.¹²⁵ As Cowen pointed out, both Catholics and Non-conformists were excluded from the judiciary and the Cabinet, and it was to the credit of the Irish that they had "not been as narrow as Englishmen and Scotchmen in their political leanings". He praised the willingness of some Roman Catholic constituencies to elect Protestants as their representatives¹²⁶ and claimed that if Dissenters could convincingly demonstrate their determination to remove religious inequalities "this would be accomplished with less hesitation than most people imagined".¹²⁷

The relative insignificance of Orangeism on Tyneside was a contributory factor, and Cowen cited this as one of the reasons why there was no comparable Tory reaction in the 1874 Elections.¹²⁸ Reviewing the political scene in 1877, Cowen said there was only one way to beat the Tories and that

was for "Liberal Churchmen, Nonconformists and working men to make common cause in favour of the nation, and against the interests of either sects or classes".¹²⁹ Unfortunately, as Cowen was forced to admit, the Liberals were "divided", "dispirited and demoralised". The Liberal Party, he said, could no longer depend upon Irish votes as "they viewed questions submitted to them, not from an English or a Liberal point of view, but from an Irish aspect".¹³⁰ Only a concerted campaign for religious equality, he believed, would reunite them and resurrect popular support.

Irish involvement in Temperance provided another important link with the Non-conformist lobby. Blue Ribbon Lodges flourished on Tyneside and attracted praise from Cowen who was invited to address their annual conference in 1882.:

The Tories have a plaster and the Liberals have a pill-many pills indeed for curing all the ills that flesh is heir to. (Laughter and Cheers) The Democrats want structural, and the Socialists, functional alterations. There is something to be said for all their plans...but neither franchise nor education, nor social transformation will, of themselves, keep people sober- sobriety must precede all moral, mental and political reformation if that reformation is to be real.¹³¹

Ultimately, political activity aimed at securing Church reform had vital social advantages for the local Irish. It gave them an entree into other voluntary organisations - Temperance, cooperatives, mechanics' institutes etc.- which Joan Smith argues were so significant a barometer for measuring Irish assimilation.¹³² In Glasgow and Edinburgh the Irish were well represented in local Temperance groups whereas in Liverpool their involvement in such organisations was considerably less. Inevitably, this had a negative impact upon their ability to successfully integrate with the host community. Politics was the key and, on Tyneside, the politics of religion was only one side of

the coin. The Land question, which had proved so enduring a feature of Tyneside Radicalism since the the time of Spence, was a major preoccupation of both groups and it was this issue , more than any other, which determined the cohesiveness of local politics.

Cowen was vociferous in his denunciation of the laws of primogeniture and entail. He regarded the custom as "not only mischievous but, in certain aspects, unnatural."¹³³ Every venture aimed at encouraging a wider distribution of the land received his firm support. The Freehold Land Association, for instance, was warmly welcomed and he derived particular satisfaction from the achievements of the working men of his own village. In 1848, a number of Winlaton men purchased four acres of good land, 'California', which they divided into eighteen allotments. They also secured some additional ground which was "laid out as gardens for the workmen".¹³⁴ Providing similar opportunities for the wider Tyneside community was intrinsically built in to Cowen's commitment to Cooperation:

...above all, let us unite to be the proprietors of the land in which we live. This is the true end and aim of cooperation. Without it, every other form of union will sooner or later prove a failure.¹³⁵

He accepted that the agrarian system could not be easily nor quickly democratized but he urged reformers to press for reform:

Every dispassionate observer must detect grave political danger in the locking up of so large a portion of the soil of the country in the hands of a section of the population—relatively small and progressively dwindling—who have profited so enormously, and with so little effort of their own, by the national prosperity. And, calling for a repeal of all laws which made land transactions "tedious,

uncertain or costly", he concluded

I would link past tradition with future hope, and subordinate the interest of party to that of nation, the interest of classes to that of justice, the interests of section to that of liberty, and the interests of all to the elevation of man.¹³⁶

Land reform became the Radical issue par excellence in the latter half of the nineteenth century.¹³⁷ Mill and Marx, Henry George and Chamberlain, all put forward their own strategy for change and while some initiatives were more successful than others, collectively they influenced the orientation of British Radicalism. Economic depression in the early 1870's drew attention to the plight of the agricultural labourers and fuelled the debate.¹³⁸ Joseph Arch, leader of the N.A.L.U., presented the situation as a stark choice: "Union or No Union, Serfdom or Manhood, Bondage or Liberty, Feudalism or Fraternity for the Labourers of Our Nation" in his appeal to the Trade Unionists of G. Britain and Ireland.¹³⁹ Arch insisted that an increase in wages was not the primary aim of the movement-

he had a higher idea respecting it than to believe that all the benefit they would derive from it would be a rise in wages to the extent of 2/- or 3/- per week. He was concerned to educate the labourers.¹⁴⁰

As a committed Methodist, Arch linked the issues of land and church reform together. For, as he explained to a gathering of the Liberation Society, a good deal of suffering and poverty could have been avoided "if the Christian ministers in the villages of England had spoken out fearlessly ...and done their duty as they ought to have done"¹⁴¹ Cowen gave firm backing to Arch's efforts, and played a key role in the formation of local branches of the

By the time Cowen entered parliament, his interest in land reform became increasingly informed by his understanding of the Irish problem. His appointment to the Royal Agricultural Commission absorbed all his energies. In a letter to his friend R.B.Reed, he exclaimed

I am absorbed in the Irish Land Question, with the Commission meeting four times a week and the Bill going on in the House of Commons, I hear and think about little else.¹⁴³

Frequent visits to Ireland served only to confirm his resolve to press for reform, winning him the warm approval and gratitude of the Tyneside Irish. As John Martin M.P.(Meath) told the Irish gathered in the Town Hall for their annual St.Patricks Day celebration, "Cowen was the most valuable friend that Ireland had among Englishmen":

English Members of Parliament had all been educated to be ignorant of the truth about Irish matters....he only knew one English Member who not only desired to remove the injustice that had already been done, who not only desired that Irishmen should be as free as Englishmen, one who not only sympathised with the Irish...but who actually knew their case, and had taken the trouble to make himself well acquainted with it.¹⁴⁴

Cowen had little time for side issues which he feared would distract popular feeling away from more pressing matters, namely Irish reform. Consequently, the Chronicle took up cudgels against the Tichborne Claimant who Cowen described as a "very vulgar hero".¹⁴⁵ The trial of Arthur Orton, which lasted 102 days was published at great length on account of the enormous public

interest in the case. Editorial comment, however, was aggressively derogatory. "What a nefarious business" asserted Adams, "the whole network of villainy reeks with foulness and stench".¹⁴⁶ The Magna Charta Association spawned in the wake of the Claimant's imprisonment attracted some adherents, particularly in South Shields following a series of lectures in Newcastle by Dr. Kenealy.¹⁴⁷ Despite dogged attempts by Cowen and his editors to expose the Movement's "preposterous quackery and immoral system of agitation", not everyone was convinced that Orton and Kenealy were "imposters."¹⁴⁸ When the Northumberland Miners decided to invite Kenealy to address their annual Picnic, Cowen was frankly dismayed and declined to attend. Other speakers, Bradlaugh and Alexander MacDonald also refused to share a platform with him. Burt, of course, found himself in an impossible position. His attendance was obligatory. Fortunately for all concerned, Kenealy himself withdrew, thus sparing Burt considerable discomfiture.¹⁴⁹ The Chronicle deplored the "wasted energies" to effect the "substitution of one landed proprietor for another", arguing that time might have been better spent "agitating for land tenure reform".¹⁵⁰ Elsewhere, the agitation appears to have been much more resilient. The movement's tenth annual demonstration attracted deputations from Nottingham, Sheffield, Leeds, Manchester and Liverpool, though noticeably no Tyneside contingent.¹⁵¹

Irish affairs returned to public prominence in the wake of the 1880 Election. The agricultural crisis in Ireland, and the upsurge of disorder that accompanied it, caused increasing concern in government circles and prompted a wave of coercive legislation. Cowen was one of the few "maverick" M.P.s to oppose the Liberal's coercive policy, earning him the support and loyalty of the Tyneside Irish - and the vituperative animosity of the local Liberal Association executive.¹⁵² Publication of full division lists, singling

out local politicians who voted for Irish coercion, did not endear Cowen to members who felt strongly that he should toe the party line. With some justification, they complained that the Chronicle conspicuously failed to represent Liberal policy. Eviction statistics, not Gladstonian eulogies, filled the pages of the Cowen press.¹⁵³ By November 1880, the number of recorded evictions stood at 10,657, and, on Tyneside, membership of the Irish Land League grew accordingly. Once again, mining communities proved the most active; Wallsend, Walker, Houghton, Murton and Ashington were but a few of the Branches whose regular meetings were given prominent publicity.¹⁵⁴ Not surprisingly, when Cowen decided to send a delegation to Ireland on a fact finding mission, he selected two prominent mining leaders (Bryson N.M.A. & Paterson D.M.A.) to make up the group.¹⁵⁵ An account of the visit was subsequently published in a series of articles. The Ladies Land League was no less successful in finding willing recruits and the first meeting of the Newcastle branch was held in the Irish Literary Institute in March 1881.¹⁵⁶ Cowen's undaunted defence of Irish interests, at a time when other renowned radicals such as Chamberlain were trimming their sails to suit the weather¹⁵⁷, so impressed the Nationalists that they offered him an Irish seat, "he might have his pick of twenty!"¹⁵⁸ Newcastle, in the circumstances, was the obvious choice when the National Land League of G.Britain planned their first convention in August 1881. Healey spoke warmly of the Tyneside people, "he had learned to love the people by whose side he had worked", and thanked Cowen for enduring "prejudice, aye, and obloquy for the sake of what he knew was right and true".¹⁵⁹ Seven local radicals were elected alongside Cowen to serve as national executives.¹⁶⁰ It is some measure of the esteem in which local radicals were held that they should be accorded the same status in the League as Parnell, Biggar and T.P.O'Connor.

On Tyneside, radical interests had become so interwoven with that of the Irish people as to be scarcely distinguishable. And, in 1881, the advent of Henry George's book Poverty and Progress was initially welcomed as a valuable contribution to the land nationalization debate.¹⁶¹ Michael Davitt, founder of the Irish Land League, had met George in New York in 1880 and was so impressed by his land scheme that he agreed to help promote the book on his return to Britain.¹⁶² Hyndman, whose brainchild the Social Democratic Federation had adopted 'land nationalization' and 'legislative independence for Ireland' as key objectives, subsequently invited George to stay at his London home during his visit to Britain in 1882.¹⁶³ For a time, their shared interests in land and Irish reform enabled them to collaborate but, eventually, the clear divide between George's capitalist doctrine and Hyndman's socialist beliefs proved insurmountable. Equally, it would seem that George aroused more controversy than support on Tyneside. His ideas were said to have been 'borrowed' from the Tyneside radicals Spence and Devyr and, as a result, the Chronicle was anxious to set the record straight.¹⁶⁴ Events in Ireland were said to have quickened public interest in the issue, thus engendering far greater receptiveness to George's ideas. 'Notes From The Farm', a column which ostensibly offered farming tips and weather forecasts, but was actually a shrewd piece of political journalism, argued that "we have a land question to settle in England as well as in Ireland".¹⁶⁵ Moreover, as Lloyd Jones explained, it should be possible to legislate away land ownership since the government all too "frequently legislates on the land in India and Ireland"¹⁶⁶ Devyr, who was planning a visit to Newcastle to promote his own book in 1884, was scathing and loudly complained that George had "mixed up nonsense with his methods".¹⁶⁷ Although after 1888 George promoted a 'single tax' scheme as the optimum method of land reform, prior to that date he was advocating a nation-

-alisation programme by confiscation.¹⁶⁸ The correspondence pages of the Chronicle were subsequently inundated with letters from readers such as W.Smith of Wallsend, claiming that George's scheme of 'nationalization without compensation' would be disastrous to ordinary working people

...will ruin thousands of small landowners...wage earning classes who, by their own industry and the help of the Building Societies of which they are members, possess or hope to possess, at some future time, a house they may call their own.¹⁶⁹

The Newcastle Industrial Land and Building Society, established in 1873, was by that time flourishing and the amount of money invested was, as William Trotter observed, "not without important significance...to the land question."¹⁷⁰

Parnell's intervention sounded the death knell of Georgism in the locality. He highlighted the "absurd and preposterous proposition" of encouraging tenants to become the owners of their own holding and then expecting them to "turn around, retrace their steps and commence anew".¹⁷¹

Just as in Birmingham where the political norm was dictated by its leading figure, Joseph Chamberlain, so on Tyneside, local politics assumed the pro-Irish bias of Cowen. The land issue which Chamberlain adopted as his own political platform was pursued solely as an English reform, to assist the agricultural labourers.¹⁷² Quinault believes that Chamberlain's opposition to Home Rule derived essentially from his annoyance that Irish issues were squeezing out his agrarian reforms.¹⁷³ Cowen and the Tyneside Radicals had no such difficulties. Home Rule was the central plank of Cowen's radical programme. He had been its advocate for many years, long before Gladstone's supposed conversion and it had even brought him in to headlong collision with his local party. Cowenite Radicalism, which explicitly promoted civil liberty, agrarian

reform and religious equality, had profound meaning for both English and Irish radicals. Legislative freedom for the Irish, as embodied in the Home Rule Campaign, could not legitimately be denied by those who had so willingly adopted those principles. Home Rule, denounced by its opponents as a divisive measure which threatened to destroy the Empire was, said Cowen, "a decentralising but not a disuniting Bill". His aim was to achieve

..national union - union, mark, not centralization. These two are not only dissimilar, but antagonistic. Destroy the Empire! Why I would grapple it together with hooks of steel - make it as lasting as the granite which underlies the island.... We seek to show that the Empire is not a noun of multitude, but a moral personality that its benignity is its strength..."¹⁷⁴

The unity which Cowen had nurtured so carefully among the Tyneside radicals entirely eluded the parliamentary Liberal Party. The Irish question, which had strengthened Tyneside Radicalism, ultimately exposed the inherent contradictions and weakness of nineteenth century Liberalism and, in so doing, proved to be a fatally disruptive force.

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3. Support for the Irish was also given by Cowen's son Joseph, who helped them to establish the Tyneside Irish Brigade at the time of the Boer War. see F.Lavery (Ed) : IRISH HEROES IN THE WAR (1917)
4. T.P.O'Connor: 'The Irish in Great Britain' in Lavery op.cit. notes that Cowen was "one of only seven Englishmen who stood up in the Commons to protest" about the Coercion Act. p27.
5. some local security measures were implemented, as directed by the government, but they were always regarded as precautionary. Attempts to arm the police were rigorously resisted. Even the 'conservative' Newcastle Journal accepted that while "Fenian partisans are not wanting in Newcastle and the vicinity.. ..there was no fear of any unrest" (25.11.1867)
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8. Ibid. Information drawn from a list of the 'top twenty' Irish towns in Britain in 1851. p66
9. J.G.Lynch: 'The Irish Population in Darlington 1841-1851' in DURHAM LOCAL HISTORY SOCIETY BULLETIN No43 Dec. 1989, states that immigrants stopped off in Scotland before arriving on Tyneside. p45
10. Cooter op.cit. p22
11. F.Lavery op.cit. claims that Mons. McCartan "sent to Newcastle a constant stream of lads from his native county" and was thus responsible for the strong Co.Down leavening in the Tyneside "colony" p328
12. O'Tuathaigh op.cit. p16 ; Walton op.cit. p183
13. Pooley op.cit. cautions against conventional stereotypes, arguing that a 'substantial minority' of skilled Irish workers were also widely dispersed in the residential suburbs. p80 ; see also T.McDermott: 'The Irish Workers on Tyneside' in N.McCord (Ed): ESSAYS IN TYNESIDE LABOUR HISTORY (1977), who claims that there is no evidence to suggest that the Irish were coerced or pressured into residential 'ghettos'. p163
14. Cooter op.cit. pp22f
15. Newcastle Daily Chronicle 25.1.1873. From a series of articles which surveyed local mining communities: 'OUR COLLIERY VILLAGES'
16. Tom Gallagher: 'A Tale of Two Cities : Communal Strife in Glasgow and Liverpool Before 1914' in Swift & Gilley: VICTORIAN CITY, op.cit.: p108
17. Ibid; also O'Tuathaigh op.cit. p20
18. Gallagher op.cit. p109; also Joan Smith op.cit. p46

- 19.R.J.Cooter op.cit. p55.
- 20.G.Davis:'Little Irelands'in Swift & Gilley(Eds):BRITAIN op.cit:
contasts the tolerance of Newcastle with the ' Irish Fever'in Cardiff.p115
- 21.R.J.Cooter op.cit. p59; GATESHEAD OBSERVER:29.7.1848 Editorial:
"In no part of the kingdom can the Poor Law be more faithfully administered.
... the resident and the casual poor alike enjoy the relief."
- 22.Newcastle Daily Chronicle.Editorial'Irishmen in England'24.12.1867:which
also noted that there had been no municipal enactments against Irish
immigrants and expressed regret that 'honest'Irish workers in London were
to be sacked in reprisal for the recent Fenian outrages.
- 23.Joan Smith op.cit.notes that the Liverpool job market was mainly transport
and commerce and that there was greater competition in this sector.p48f
also see Cooter op.cit.p191.
- 24.Gallagher op.cit.p110;Walton op.cit. p252.
- 25.Cooter op.cit. pp193-204.
- 26.D.Thompson: 'Ireland and the Irish in English Radicalism before 1850' in
J.Epstein&D.Thompson(eds): THE CHARTIST EXPERIENCE(1982)p130.
- 27.Cooter op.cit. p47.
- 28.Examples of this are numerous,for instance,The Address of the LONDON
FRIENDLY SOCIETY OF OPERATIVE CARPENTERS to the OPERATIVE CARPENTERS of
GREAT BRITAIN & IRELAND, published in the Northern Liberator 24.3.1838
- 29.POOR MAN'S GUARDIAN 1831-35,reprinted 1969: 12.2.1832,p274.
- 30.NEWCASTLE DAILY CHRONICLE 29 1 1867,carries a full account of previous
Tyneside radical Demonstrations,including the 1819 meeting;see J.Belchem:
'Feargus O'Connor and the collapse of the Mass Platform' in Thompson &
Epstein(Eds) op.cit., noting that the Spenceans plan to build up a General
Union of the Non Represented of the U.K. of G.Britain and Ireland was
promoted through their "aptly named journal". p88.
- 31.Newcastle Daily Chronicle 29.1.1867 states that the official Reform League
banner was "blue for Scotland,red for England and green for Ireland".
- 32.NORTHERN LIBERATOR 29.12.1838.Political speeches were interspersed with
appropriate songs-in this instance "Sprig of Shillelagh"("...With his sprig
of shillelah,and shamrock so green / His heart is good-humoured,'tis honest
and sound / no malice or hatred is there to be found....") Harney's
reference to Robert Emmett,the renowned United Irishman executed for his
seditious activities would have been considered inflammatory by the
authorities.
- 33.Ibid.
- 34.NORTHERN LIBERATOR 1.7.1838.
- 35.see Chartist Letters printed in the NCLE.WEEKLY CHRONICLE,21.7.1883;27.9.
1884 by Peter Doyle.Doyle claimed to have thrown a piece of broken granite
at the Mayor,John Fife,during the Battle of the Spital.He also claims that
"...seditious schemes were concocted...and a diabolical project planned
to burn the town"in the offices of the Northern Liberator.
- 36.Ibid.McKinney described himself as the son of a farmer from Londonderry,
dispossessed by the laws of primogeniture and subsequently sacked by a
Scottish clergyman for his political views.He had met with a similar fate
in other parts of England.Other speakers,including James Ayr (mason)Richard
Ayre(publican,and treasurer of the NPU)Mr.Parker("delegate of four factories
on the Tyne")actively promoted Irish interests in a partisan way on many
occasions.
- 37.NORTHERN LIBERATOR 1.9.1838:Address of the W.M.A.of North Shields to the
Democrats of G.Britain and Ireland,24.8.1838.signatories:James Waugh and
James McKean Henderson.

38. NORTHERN LIBERATOR 13.4.1839: John Rucastle (druggist) speaking at a public meeting in the Guild Hall.
39. Ibid. same meeting, speech by William Thomason of the N.P.U.
40. Ibid. N.P.U. Council meeting at Howdon Pans 13.3.1839. The sub committee comprised Richard Ayre, James Ayr and John Mason (shoemaker).
41. Ibid. 29.12.1838. Parker, a delegate of four factories remarked upon the "beautiful sight" made by the gathered "company of his fair Radical country-women".
42. Newcastle Journal: 1.4.1848 regarded Kennington Common as "a miserable failure", citing the "disorderly spirit" and the way that "a Mr. Kidd raved about Ireland".
43. J. Saville: 1848 THE BRITISH STATE & THE CHARTIST MOVEMENT pp73-4 Saville agrees with D. Thompson's claim for strong links between English and Irish Radicals, particularly in the Northern industrial towns, but stresses the noticeable shift in attitudes in 1848 which marked closer working relationships.
44. Newcastle Journal. 7.10.1848; also Gateshead Observer: 15.4.1848.
45. R. Church: 'Chartism and the Miners: A Reinterpretation' in LABOUR HISTORY REVIEW: Vol 56, Pt3, 1991, Pp 23-33.
46. Northern Liberator 25.5.39; also 3.3.1838. Deputation of the W.M.A. to a meeting of pitmen at Wylam, with men from three collieries in the district and the miners of the St Lawrence Colliery. The Newcastle Mineworkers Institute confirms that the St. Lawrence colliery was located in the All Saints area and that the pit was sunk between 1832-3.
47. T.A. Devyr: THE ODD BOOK OF THE NINETEENTH CENTURY (1882). Devyr was the son of a United Irishman who came to Newcastle in 1838 and soon became a prominent member of the N.P.U. He subsequently emigrated to America but he retained close links with local radicals and returned to Newcastle in 1884 to publicize his Land Plan.
48. COWEN PAPERS C547, 28.2.1859. see Chapter 2 for a full account of the N.R.U.
49. Newcastle Daily Chronicle: 3.1.1872. Thomas Connolly, addressing a meeting of the Tyneside Engineers.
50. John Belchem op.cit. p278; Newcastle Journal 29.10.1867 which states that the wealthy middle class supporters will be discouraged if the Reform League does not publicly denounce Fenianism.
51. P. Quinliven & P Rose: THE FENIANS IN ENGLAND (1982) pp65-72. Disturbances were reported in Birmingham where 'a rival mob of several hundred held a meeting in favour of hanging the Manchester prisoners.
52. statistics quoted by D. Fitzpatrick in 'A Curious Middle Place' in Swift & Gilley (Eds) BRITAIN op.cit. p33; see also Newcastle Weekly Chronicle which published a series of articles on Secret Societies in 1878. esp 2.2.1878 stating that Newcastle, London, Liverpool, Manchester and Glasgow were all major centres of the Brotherhood in 1864.
53. T.P. O'Connor op.cit. p47.
54. Newcastle Daily Chronicle: 13.12.1865 Editorial criticising the harsh sentences imposed on the Fenians and denouncing the tendency to "brand Irish people as 'low, ignorant and indolent'".
55. Ibid 2.10.1867: Editorial 'Fenianism: Its Cause and Its Cure'.
56. Newcastle Daily Chronicle 6.7.1866; N. Todd: THE MILITANT DEMOCRACY (1991) p69
57. O.R. Ashton: W.E. ADAMS: CHARTIST, RADICAL AND JOURNALIST (1832-1906) (1991) p109 Garibaldi's tour of Britain was cut short and he never returned to Newcastle. The Testimonial committee set up to arrange a civic reception "maintained its existence indefinitely...it became essentially the parent....of the Northern Reform League".

58. Newcastle Daily Chronicle: 6.7.1866.
59. Newcastle Courant: 20.7.1866, also see R.J.Cooter op.cit.p232.
60. Newcastle Daily Chronicle: 19.7.1866.
61. J.Walton: p261; also Quinliven & Rose op.cit. Chapter 4 which gives a detailed account of the Murphy Riots; Roger Swift: 'Crime and the Irish' in Swift & Gilley (Eds): BRITAIN op.cit.p170 surveys the anti-Catholic and anti-Irish disorders which took place after mid century and links them to the resurgence of popular Protestantism.
62. Ibid. p172.
63. Quinliven & Rose op.cit pp33-34; also J.Walton op.cit. p261.
64. Newcastle Daily Chronicle 26.8.1867.
65. T.P.McDermott: 'Charles Larkin, Radical Reformer 1800-1879' in NORTHERN CATHOLIC HISTORY Vol. 28, August 1988:
66. Newcastle Weekly Chronicle: 'Larkin's Letters' 1.2.1868. Larkin is careful to insist upon justice for the Irish, as a cure for Fenianism, not punitive action.
67. T.Gray: THE ORANGE ORDER (1972) stating that Manchester was the organisational headquarters of Orangeism, p89.; T.P.McDermott op.cit. states that disturbances tended to be located south of the Tyne, p160; Isolated incidents between Fenians and Orangemen were reported in the North of England Farmer 18.2.1871 (Consett), and 15.7.1871 (West Hartlepool); 4.2.1871 (Hartlepool); 11.2.1871 (Bishop Auckland) and would seem to confirm McDermott's statement.
68. Newcastle Guardian 28.1.1871
69. Newcastle Daily Chronicle 26.9.1867; 28.9.1867. The police were said to be "on the alert". Steamers leaving Hartlepool were rigorously searched.
70. Editorial in the Newcastle Daily Chronicle, 11.10.1867.
71. Newcastle Daily Chronicle 10.10.1867; 16.10.1867; 8.11.1867.
72. Newcastle Daily Chronicle 2.9.1867.
73. Newcastle Daily Chronicle 9.10.1867: "We have every confidence in the loyalty of the Irish element in our towns".
74. Newcastle Daily Chronicle 23.11.1867; Newcastle Weekly Chronicle 6.12.1867.
75. Newcastle Daily Chronicle 25.11.1867.
76. Newcastle Journal 16.12.1867.
77. Newcastle Daily Chronicle 16.12.1867.
78. Newcastle Journal 16.12.1867; also see Quinliven & Rose op.cit. p97.
79. see Newcastle Daily Chronicle throughout December 1867, especially the Editorial 'Irishmen in England', 24.12.1867.
80. Report of the meeting in the Newcastle Daily Chronicle. Joseph Cowen Snr. claimed that he had been to Ireland and witnessed the injustice they suffered at first hand.
81. Newcastle Journal 25.11.1867; 6.12.1867.
82. Newcastle Daily Chronicle 11.12.1866.
83. Newcastle Daily Chronicle 11.3.1867.
84. Newcastle Daily Chronicle 29.1.1867. Tricolour Banner="Blue for Scotland, Green for Ireland and Red for England".
85. F.M.Leventhal: RESPECTABLE RADICAL George Howell & Victorian Working Class Politics (1971) p98.
86. Lucraft's statement was reported in the Newcastle Journal 25.10.1867.
87. see Cowen Papers for a full account of the Northern Reform League: C1742f Irish Trade delegates included Ralph Anderson DMA, John Charlton NMA, George Hill Ncle. Society of Boilermakers, John Cummings Brassfounders & Brass-finishers, James Campbell Boilermakers & Iron Shipbuilders (Jarrow).
88. Michael Bentley: THE CLIMAX OF BRITISH POLITICS (1987) p60; also see J. Walton op.cit.p262 who notes the importance of the sectarian issue during

- the 1868 election.
- 89 Cooter op.cit.p244.
 - 90.J.P.Dunbabin 'Electoral Reforms and their Outcome in the U.K.1865-1900' in T.R.Gourvish & A.O'Day (ed.)LATER VICTORIAN BRITAIN (1988)pp118-21.
 - 91.J.K.Walton op.cit.p262 states that "religious affiliation was remarkably effective as a touchstone for political alignment".
 - 92.see Chapter 3 for a full account of Cowen's 'Non-Sectarian' policy;also Walton op.cit.p260 who highlights the divisions caused by the Liberals' education reform in the Lancashire area.
 - 93.O.R.Ashton op.cit.pp111-2,describing the miners 1873 campaign and the role of the Cowenite Press.
 - 94.R.Fynes:THE MINERS OF NORTHUMBERLAND & DURHAM (1873)Chapter XLIII.According to Fynes'statistics,N/land & Durham had 51,000 members in 1873 compared with 27,000 in Yorkshire.
 - 95.The Cowen Papers,C1779.
 - 96.Ibid.,various papers including C1801,C1804,C1808.
 - 97.Ibid C1822 Speech Cowen 12.4.73;also see C1779,C1808.For an account of the demonstration see Fynes op.cit. p269,Chapter XLV.
 - 98.Newcastle Daily Chronicle 14.4.1873 (Special edition).
 - 99.McDermott op.cit. notes that McAnulty was the first Irishman to sit on an English Town Council p167.
 - 100.T.W.Moody:DAVITT & THE IRISH REVOLUTION 1846-82(1981) Moody gives a good account of Barry's early life and career as a commercial traveller in Newcastle,and his activities as a member of the Supreme Council of the IRB, p125;also see Lavery op.cit. pp51-3 who states that Barry organized the Irish vote in Newcastle in the early 1870's.
 - 101.Alan O'Day 'Political Organization 1869-90' pp190-5 in Swift & Gilley (Eds) BRITAIN
 - 102.Ibid. p193, O'Day states that "attempts were made to mould disparate associations into a unified organization".
 - 103.Newcastle Weekly Chronicle 6.1.1872.
 - 104.Ibid.Local activists at the Town Hall meeting were:Bayfield,Barry,M.Curran John Devine,Charles Flannagan,Joseph Heenan,John Mullen,Patrick Mooney,J. McGill,J.McKay,W.McEvoy,McKintyre,Michael O'Hanlon, Stephen Quin,Matthew Roddy,Edward Savage,Smyth, F.Wallace.
 - 105.L.O'Broin:REVOLUTIONARY UNDERGROUND (1976)p11 Butt allegedly made a secret agreement with the Fenians,promising to relinquish control to them if,at the end of three years,Home Rule had not been achieved.
 - 106.O'Day op.cit.p195.
 - 107.Butt Papers:Letter dated 23.8.1873 as cited in O'Day op.cit. p195.
 - 108.Newcastle Weekly Chronicle 18.1.1873;25.1.1873;6.2.1875.
 - 109.T.P.O'Connor op.cit. p25; also in Lavery op.cit. Part 11 by Joseph Keating describing Cowen's sympathy for the Irish as "extraordinary".Cowen,he claimed, was the "rallying point of British democratic and Irish forces", p27.
 - 110.Cowen Papers B399 8.9.1884.
 - 111.O.D.Edwards & P.J.Storey:'The Irish Press in Victorian Britain' p173 in Swift & Gilley(Eds)op.cit.VICTORIAN CITY ;also see the Cowen Papers: Letter from Cowen to Charles Diamond 2.2.1886.Diamond was born in Co Derry in 1858 and moved to Newcastle in the 1870's.He was President of a local branch of the I.N.L. in 1884.Diamond successfully published several Catholic weeklies including the IRISH TRIBUNE,GLASGOW OBSERVER,WEEKLY HERALD (later the CATHOLIC HERALD).Listed in Lavery op.cit' WHO's WHO of the Tyneside Irish Movement' p323.

112. The phrase is used by O'Tuathaigh op.cit. p23 who states that ethnic social groups and institutions created a cultural distance that was "very difficult to bridge".
113. Newcastle Weekly Chronicle:7.5.1881
114. M.Milne:NEWSPAPERS OF NORTHUMBERLAND & DURHAM (1971) states the skilled working class read the Daily Chronicle, and the broad mass of working men were more likely to read the Weekly. p29.
115. Newcastle Weekly Chronicle 3.4.1875 gives a lengthy obituary of John Martin M.P. who was transported for ten years for Fenian activities and later represented Co.Meath as a constitutionalist; also Biography of Wolfe Tone, founder of the Society of United Irishmen (1763-1798) 7.8.1875; Lloyd Jones (1811-86) was born in Ireland of Welsh parentage. He was an active cooperator and trade unionist, member of the SDF and numerous other radical organisations. He wrote for a number of newspapers including the Glasgow Sentinel and the Ncle. Chronicle.
116. Cowen Papers: Jane Cowen Mss. Chapter 11. written when Cowen was just 16 years old.
117. Cowen Papers B178 Spch. in Ncle. by Cowen 18.10.1876.
118. J.Vincent THE FORMATION OF THE BRITISH LIBERAL PARTY 1857-1868 (1966) pp104f.
119. D.M. Thompson 'The Liberation Society' in P.Hollis (Ed) PRESSURE FROM WITHOUT (1974).
120. Vincent op.cit. states that "allegiance was demanded from Liberal candidates...in proportion to the strength of dissent in the constituency". p108.
121. Newcastle Daily Chronicle:31.10.1867.
122. Ibid. 1.11.1867.
123. Newcastle Journal:31.12.1867.
124. Cowen Papers:B157, Spch. 30.12.1873.; Ncle. Liberal Association Minutes: Local Tracts L042 1878-93.
125. Newcastle Weekly Chronicle: Demonstration in Elswick Park, 25.9.1875.
126. Cowen Papers B178 Spch. on Civil and Religious Liberty, 18.10.1876.
127. Ibid.
128. Ibid. Spch. Review of the Political Scene: B180, 27.1.1877 in which Cowen stated that the "conservatism of Hammond and Ridley is much more tolerant than the Orangeism which comes from Lancashire; also see Cooter op.cit. p152 stating that on Tyneside there was no havoc on St. Patricks Day.
129. Ibid.
130. Cowen Papers B181, 27.2.1877. Spch to the Non-conformist Conference
131. Ibid. D320. 61,000 pledges made in 1882; For an analysis of Irish Temperance activities see Elizabeth Malcolm 'Temperance and Irish Nationalism' in IRELAND UNDER THE UNION F.S.L. Lyon & R.A. Hawkins (ed.), 1980.
132. B.Aspinwall & J.F. McCaffrey: 'A Comparative View of the Irish in Edinburgh in the 19th Century' p137 in THE IRISH IN THE VICTORIAN CITY op.cit.; also see J. Smith op.cit. pp47f citing Gramsci, who argued that participation in private associations helped to create a person's "spontaneous philosophy". Since those same associations constituted the 'hegemonic apparatus', involvement ensured that, in Glasgow, the shared vision of the world was 'Liberal'; on Tyneside, it was 'Radical'.
133. Cowen Papers Letter Cowen to H.B. Thompson (Ncle): "I would have the land of the country disposed of as easily and as freely as you would dispose of railway stocks and bank shares.."
134. Cowen Papers D87 Northern Tribune gives an account of the purchase of 'California' from H.T. Liddell at a cost of £370.

135. Cowen Papers B122 North of England Cooperative Almanack 1873.
136. Cowen Papers B349 Cowen commenting on the publication of his election speeches in 1885.
137. see R.Harrison: BEFORE THE SOCIALISTS (1965), pp210-217; P.Hollis (ed) op.cit pp9-11, also in the same volume D.Martin: 'Land Reform'; T.W.Heyck : THE DIMENSIONS OF BRITISH RADICALISM (1974) pp19f.
138. J.P.D.Dunbabin: THE REVOLT OF THE FIELD (1974).
139. Cowen Papers B152 Broadsheet of the N.A.L.U. May 1873.
140. Newcastle Weekly Chronicle 24.2.1875 spch to N.A.L.U. rally at Hungerford
141. Cowen Papers B288 27.3.1883 Cowen presided over this meeting of the Liberation Society in Ncle.; also see Ncle Weekly Chronicle 31.3.1883.
142. Cowen Papers B125 3.3.1873: Letter J.E.Ashton of Mitford asking Cowen to approach Arch on their behalf for assistance in setting up a local branch
143. Cowen Papers B415 undated but probably between 1878-1880.
144. Newcastle Weekly Chronicle 20.3.1875; also Cowen Papers B210 Meeting in Ncle.Town Hall. Dr.Rutherford said Cowen "linked the Land Question and the Irish Question together".
145. Newcastle Weekly Chronicle 3.4.1875: Cowen's LONDON LETTER. Arthur Orton, a claimant to the Tichborne Estates spawned a popular movement, the Magna Charta Association. He was imprisoned in 1872 after a trial lasting 102 days.; For an account of the national movement, see R.McWilliams: 'The Tichborne Claimant and the People. Investigations into Popular Culture 1867-1886' Unpublished PhD thesis (Sussex) 1990; and, by the same author, 'Radicalism and popular culture: the Tichborne case and the politics of 'fair play', 1867-1886' in E.F.Biagini & A.Reid (Eds) CURRENTS OF RADICALISM Popular radicalism, organised labour and party politics in Britain, 1850-1914 (1991).
146. Newcastle Weekly Chronicle 9.3.1872.
147. Newcastle Weekly Chronicle 16.10.1875. Kenealy, later M.P. for Stoke, acted as defending counsel for Orton and later presided over the M.C. Association
148. numerous references including Newcastle Weekly Chronicle 27.2.1875; 10.4.1875 17.4.1875.
149. Newcastle Weekly Chronicle 30.5.1875 Cowen had voted against a Royal Commission of Enquiry into the case when the issue was debated in the Commons on 1.5.1875.
150. Newcastle Weekly Chronicle Editorial 24.2.1875.
151. Newcastle Weekly Chronicle 7.6.84. gives an account of the demonstration in Hyde Park.
152. Heyck op.cit.p65.
153. Newcastle Daily Chronicle 19.1.1881.
154. Newcastle Daily Chronicle 31.1.1881; 5.2.1881; 26.2.1881; 17.3.1881; 23.4.1881
155. Cowen Papers F43 3.9.1881.
156. Newcastle Weekly Chronicle 23.2.1881. Ladies Land League had 130 members also recruitment drive by Gateshead L.L. 5.2.1881, 8.2.1881.
157. Heyck op.cit.p64 quoting from THE TIMES. Chamberlain reputedly told his constituents that while he hated coercion "we hate disorder more"
158. Newcastle Weekly Chronicle 17.3.1881. account of the St.Patrick's Day Soiree.
159. Cowen Papers B245 29.8.1881; also Newcastle Weekly Chronicle 3.9.1881.
160. Cowen Papers Ibid. Executives (local) were Cowen, Bernard McAnulty, John Bryson, John Mullen, Peter Byrne, P.Jennings, M.Conway and E.McHugh.
161. Newcastle Weekly Chronicle 26.11.1881. For a biography of George see E.P.Lawrence: HENRY GEORGE IN THE BRITISH ISLES (1957); Kunitz & Haycroft (eds) AMERICAN AUTHORS 1600-1900 (1938) also see Avner Offer: PROPERTY AND

- POLITICS 1870-1914 (1981)pp184-201.
162. Moody op.cit. pp413-4; Lawrence op.cit. p8,19.
163. Chushichi Tzuzuki: H.M. HYNDMAN & BRITISH SOCIALISM (1961) p45.
164. Newcastle Weekly Chronicle 9.2.1884: 'The Gossips Bowl' (column by 'Robin Goodfellow') stated Spence's scheme was "agitated with great fervour and intelligence during the Chartist agitation"; also, see Letter in the Weekly Chronicle 23.4.1881 from Holyoake who attributes George's scheme to Devyr.
165. Newcastle Weekly Chronicle 16.4.1881 The column was signed W.T. (Wm. Trotter).
166. Newcastle Weekly Chronicle 6.1.1883; Editorial 2.2.1884.
167. Newcastle Weekly Chronicle 15.3.1884 Letter from Devyr; also 5.7.1884, giving a report of Devyr's visit.
168. Lawrence op.cit. states that the Land Reform Union asked George to 'play down' his 'no compensation policy' p32,52.
169. Newcastle Weekly Chronicle 5.4.1884; 26.4.1884.
170. Newcastle Weekly Chronicle: Notes from the Farm 5.4.1884; Cowen Papers D274. List of the executives of the Ind. Land & Bdg. Soc.
171. Newcastle Weekly Chronicle 19.4.1884 report of speech by Parnell.
172. R. Quinault: 'Joseph Chamberlain. A Reassessment' in T.R. Gourvish & A.O'Day (Eds) : LATER VICTORIAN BRITAIN 1867-1900 (1988).
173. Ibid. p78.
174. Cowen Papers B378 Spch. to the Commons 7.6.1886.

CHAPTER5: JOSEPH COWEN AND THE RADICAL/LIBERAL ALLIANCE 1873-1886

The entrenched Liberalism of Tynesiders in the nineteenth century has been well documented,¹ their faith apparently unshakable, even in 1874, when elsewhere the Liberal Party suffered a humiliating defeat. As Cowen himself remarked, "There was no Tory reaction in the North of England". Northern Liberals, he claimed, were not only numerically greater than ever but "compared with any other district in the country" the opinions on both sides of the political spectrum were significantly more advanced.² Politically adept, as ever, he applauded the 'intelligence' of the Northern people, bestowing on them, and not himself, the credit for the Liberal victory.³ The question at issue here though, despite such neat political footwork, hinges upon accurately assessing Cowen's contribution to the events of 1874 and beyond. Perhaps his election was merely a fortuitous coincidence with little or no impact upon the chain of events. On the other hand, if there is any substance to the view that the local vote was primarily sustained by Cowen's active influence, then the wider implications of this ought to be considered. Such a premise would necessitate a radical reappraisal of grass roots Liberal popularity, with particular attention given to those explanations which cast Gladstone as the essential 'vitalizing connection' with the rank and file.⁴ To that end, it seems altogether pertinent to thoroughly scrutinize Cowen's career, as a powerful entrepreneur and local politician, and as a prominent Radical M.P. with an international reputation.

Cowen's rise to prominence was, no doubt, greatly facilitated by his family connections, wealth and local stature - the traditional accoutrements of those aspiring to political office. But the secret of his success (assuming his turbulent career can be described in such terms) also hinged upon his deliberate cultivation of the working class vote. Cowen's active involvement

in a range of working class causes earned their lasting respect, thus providing him with an additional, non-traditional sphere of influence. Moreover, this was further underpinned by his proprietorship of the Newcastle Daily Chronicle which had, by the 1870's, become a powerful political vehicle for disseminating radical views.⁵ So much more than just a provincial newspaper with a healthy circulation, it was a Cowenite manifesto reaching a national audience, avidly read by his supporters and equally carefully monitored by his rivals.

This chapter will consider the premise that local adherence to Gladstonian Liberalism is something of a misnomer. Cowen rarely, if ever, referred to himself as a Liberal, other than its broadest sense. The continuing loyalties of the Tyneside people, it is suggested, had relatively little to do with either official party policy or Gladstone's charismatic personality. In reality, what they supported was Cowenite Radicalism: a far more progressive, individualistic style of Liberalism than that ever envisaged by Gladstone and which was, moreover, tailor made to express the deep rooted radical traditions of the locality. The cheering, enthusiastic crowds who welcomed Gladstone to Tyneside in 1862 undoubtedly wished to demonstrate their esteem, but they were also responding to Cowen's eloquent endorsement of his radical credentials.⁶

Arguably, Cowen's political strength derived from his ability to cut across the class barriers by encompassing both traditional and non-traditional spheres of influence. But it was his hold on the affections and loyalties of the working classes, particularly the large Irish population, which freed him from the usual restraints of party politics, enabling him to pursue the independent stance that was to be, curiously enough, both glorious vindication and damning indictment. In 1873, Cowen was not the Liberals' chosen representative but a compromise candidate. Borne out of the recognition that he, and he alone, was the people's choice, he was perceived to be their

passport to electoral success. Or, as Cowen put it, they simply "believed his candidature would create the least division".⁷ The aim of the executive was to harness his high profile popularity securely to the Liberal bandwagon. Quite clearly, they assumed that his less desirable revolutionary impulses could be curtailed or at least contained. It was from such inauspicious beginnings that relations with the Liberals at national and local level steadily deteriorated as Cowen doggedly refused to toe the party line. The viability of political independence in the late nineteenth century will have to be fully addressed, particularly in the light of the Gurowich thesis,⁸ by considering the major points of difference separating Cowen from mainstream Liberalism. Given that his uncompromising stance on the Caucus system, the Eastern Question and the Irish Problem created the unbreachable rift which culminated in his withdrawal from national politics in 1886, these are the issues upon which the subsequent analysis will concentrate.

The 1870's heralded the dawn of a new era in British politics as the greatly expanded electorate produced by the Second Reform Act presented an ineluctable challenge to the parties of the day.⁹ Concessions embodied in the Act did not, however, embrace a genuine commitment to widen the basis of power beyond the traditionally privileged elite. As J.Vincent notes¹⁰ "the Liberals were not democrats" and, on both sides of the political divide, electoral reform sprang from a recognition that it had become "safe to concede enfranchisement and dangerous to withhold it".¹¹ With class alliances firmly to the fore, the passing of the Reform Act does not appear to have unduly disturbed the customary ebb and flow of parliamentary life.¹² But, even if power sharing had no place on the political agenda, the general consensus was that new tactics

would have to be employed if the desired equilibrium was to be maintained. This 'modernization' process, according to Dunbabin, led to a "refinement of party organisation" and a "proliferation of public speaking".¹³ Dunbabin reiterates the commonly held view that political speeches were thus an attempt to sway an electorate "...too large to be influenced in the old ways but which had come to follow politics as a spectator sport".¹⁴ While few would quarrel with the rationale of such stylistic changes, the persistent representation of late Victorian politics as entertainment or sport¹⁵ has dubious validity, implying as it does only minimal participation. Such views have been countered recently in a new study¹⁶ which argues that responses were far more rational than has generally been recognised in the past. The issue can be closely linked to interpretations which unduly stress the symbolic importance of the vote to the working man, while denying its potential as a "lever of power".¹⁷ The polarity of the historiographical debate, irreconcilably divided as to whether parliamentary pragmatism or pressure politics was the most decisive determinant, fails to address the more salient question of how events were actually perceived, at the time, by the newly enfranchised electorate.¹⁸ For, if they believed their own activities had, in any way, forced the hand of parliament this was bound to be construed by them as irrefutable confirmation of their potency. Tactical modifications on the part of the politicians would seem to suggest that they, at least, regarded the new electorate as a reckon-able force.

That being said, the requirement to find new methods and a new approach more suited to the age of mass politics flew in the face of the existing tradition. Whereas electoral qualifications could be altered at will by legislation, the customs and practices governing the attainment of political office clearly could not. Traditionally, the holders of power were expected to

display wealth, status, education, respectability and any number of other attributes, individually dictated by local circumstances. In 1868, as J.F.C. Harrison notes, Members of Parliament were still predominantly drawn from the landed class.¹⁹ Since electoral and parliamentary costs constituted a major financial burden, only those of independent means could realistically contemplate a parliamentary career.²⁰ In the North East, costs could be as high as £18-20,000, and candidates were vetted accordingly. No one, it seems, was under any illusion regarding the primacy of financial and party considerations. Cowen, of course, took great delight in relating the way that one Lancashire nominee candidly addressed the electorate: "I canna speak. I know now't o'politics. But I stink o'Brass and if you send me to the Big House I'll vote for the Party".²¹

At the local level, Councillors received neither salary nor expenses, once again significantly restricting the social group from which they were drawn. And, given that political office had an inbuilt hierarchy, a certain amount of movement through the ranks was expected before a candidate might be considered suitable to represent the local community. Active involvement in the various judicial, charitable, cultural and political institutions was the accepted means of demonstrating an ability to serve, and a clear commitment to the interests of the locality.²² The point can be graphically illustrated by Sir Joseph Cowen's presentation to the electorate in 1865. His agent, Mr. Mawson, deliberately stressed his local stature and connections, rather than his political convictions, in the belief that this would best commend him to the voters:

It is a firm and solemn conviction of my mind, arrived at after mature consideration, that a great trading and commercial and manufacturing community like this, demands that at least one of its Members ought to be identified with its interests and personally

aquainted with all its wants and requirements. Such a gentleman we find in my friend Mr. Alderman Cowen. He has been born and brought up amongst us. He has filled every office of trust and responsibility which has been imposed upon him by his fellow townsmen and he has discharged the duties incumbent upon him with credit, satisfaction and honour.²³

These local connections were very important, especially in the Northern towns. In Whitby, for instance, even W.H. Gladstone's matchless lineage conspicuously failed to endear him to the local electorate,²⁴ or adequately compensate for his want of local stature - and this at the height of Gladstone's popularity. His father's active intervention availed him very little and his majority remained perilously slim. He was persistently regarded as an outsider, not least because he failed to display the expected level of 'generosity'. In 1878, when he eventually vacated the seat in favour of Flint, Arthur Pease romped home comfortably.²⁵ Similarly, it was the lack of local roots, not funds, which cost George Howell the Aylesbury seat in 1868.²⁶ Howell's credentials as a trade unionist and reformer ought to have commended him to the constituency but, according to Walter Morrison, his financial backer, the local people "distrust a stranger be he who he may".²⁷ More than just mutuality of trust and obligation was at stake here, though this was a significant element. In fielding their own candidates, local authorities were able to give cogent public expression of their autonomy and independence.²⁸

Cowen's claim to power, in the first instance, rested firmly within this accepted orthodoxy. On the question of family, his dynastic claims were impeccable. His father had already given exemplary service to the Tyneside community as Poor Law Guardian, Town Councillor, Alderman and Mayor, while his Chairmanship of the prestigious River Tyne Commission attracted more official recognition in the form of a life peerage.²⁹ By 1873, Sir Joseph Cowen had served as senior Liberal Member for Newcastle for some eight years.

It was a commonplace then for sons, as it were, to inherit parliamentary power and, in the circumstances, Cowen was his natural successor. The Cowens' entrepreneurial success reflected well on the city, contributing to the general prosperity and providing much needed employment for the local workforce. More importantly, their financial success was expressed by that 'conspicuous generosity' which P.M.Jones identifies as an essential attribute of those seeking power.³⁰ It was not just a question of general philanthropy, although the family certainly gave generously of both time and money to the city's many charitable institutions. Their involvement in town improvement, both fabric and facilities, was of crucial importance, demonstrating as it did that the successful progress of both city and citizen were inextricably bound together.

As a Councillor, Cowen served on a number of committees, including Trade & Commerce, Water, and Schools & Charities, but the Town Improvement Committee, to which he was appointed in 1865, was undoubtedly the powerhouse of city politics and his stature grew accordingly.³¹ Through his energetic commitment to the provision of education and leisure facilities, as well as structural and functional improvements, he displayed a genuine interest in the cultural vitality of the city and the welfare of its people. It would also be fair to say that Cowen was more than capable of turning his influence on these committees to his own advantage. In financial and commercial terms, he would have gained enormously as a result. And, in much the same way, his association with the Public Library campaign and the initiative to establish a new Arts and Science College were as electorally advantageous as they were personally satisfying.

Cowen's contribution to the city prompts the obvious comparison with Joseph Chamberlain, whose 'Municipal Socialism' is widely held to have transformed Birmingham, securing its place in the annals of Liberalism and

ensuring his own impregnable powerbase.³² Roland Quinault's timely reappraisal has finally laid to rest this romantic view of Chamberlain which almost invariably portrays him as a popular provincial politician, fiercely protective of Birmingham interests and his own deeply held radical convictions.³³ He contends that Chamberlain's roots lay in London and his first concern was always for national rather than local issues.³⁴ And, as for Chamberlain's contribution to local affairs, this was short-lived, lasting a mere six years. Arguably, this contributed little to his subsequent parliamentary resilience.³⁵ Chamberlain's political success, it is thought, owed much more to his Unitarian connections 'reflecting the dominant influence which Nonconformist Liberalism exerted over the city' and rather less to his much vaunted municipal reforms.³⁶ By definition then, Cowen's local standing was of a different calibre and closer scrutiny serves only to point up the fundamental differences between them. Prior to 1876, when they disagreed publicly over the Eastern Question, relations appear to have been cordial, though not close. It was Cowen, in fact, who introduced Chamberlain to the House of Commons. Cowen's willingness to address the Birmingham Conference of the National Education League in 1871 at Chamberlain's request suggests a certain accord but, interestingly enough, the accompanying offer of hospitality was politely but firmly declined.³⁷ Chamberlain, it seems, was on rather more intimate terms with Robert Spence Watson, a wealthy Quaker solicitor who acted as Cowen's electoral agent in 1873 and subsequently presided over the Tyneside Liberal Federation. Spence Watson had a large circle of influential friends, including John Bright, a fellow Quaker. The idea of forming a Liberal Federation is said to have come from Bright.³⁸ Chamberlain became a regular visitor at the home of Spence Watson and later they collaborated closely over the formation of the National Liberal Federation.³⁹ Cowen's profound dislike of the Caucus system subsequently

placed him at odds with both men, especially Chamberlain, whom he reputedly dubbed a "bedizened place-man".⁴⁰ "Party", argued Cowen, was "the madness of the many for the gain of the few".⁴¹

In the circumstances, it seems somewhat perverse that Chamberlain should have emerged as the archetypal Radical while Cowen is scarcely remembered, even in his native city.⁴² For, unlike Cowen, Chamberlain "did not make the weather, but dressed to suit it...he was a product rather than the progenitor of urban radicalism".⁴³ While Chamberlain openly sought parliamentary power and ministerial office, Cowen's political ambitions are shrouded in ambiguity. E.I.Waitt claims that Cowen deliberately sought office; that even as he feigned disinterest, he employed devious and manipulative methods to secure his selection.⁴⁴ The hindsight testimony of Headlam and Spence Watson, upon which Waitt's analysis largely depends, is unhelpful as the objectivity of both men must be considered suspect.⁴⁵ Cowen was politically ambitious, of that there can be no doubt. What is less certain, is whether political office as a candidate **for the Liberals** was the path he would have chosen for himself. Waitt overlooks the fact that Cowen had been exhorted to stand for many years, but had consistently declined on the grounds that he could make a more useful contribution in an unofficial capacity.⁴⁶ For a man of such eclectic interests and activities, political office had definite disadvantages, not least because it would interfere with his business and keep him away from Tyneside for the greater part of the year. And, the covert activities he relished so much could only be threatened if he became the focus of too much official attention. Equally, by 1873 Cowen's reputation as a "sort of political missionary in the North East" was firmly established, and he could embark upon an electoral campaign with considerable confidence, certain of claiming a large share of the poll.⁴⁷ His father's death, and the unsuitability of the proposed candidates

produced the "peculiar circumstances"⁴⁸ which finally forced his hand:

I would have been glad if this had been otherwise. I have had no ambition for Parliamentary honours. I have been actively engaged in political warfare since I was a lad...I would rather live outside its walls, simply because I believe I could there lead a more useful life.⁴⁹

And, by his own criteria, he was an ideal candidate, easily satisfying the conditions necessary for successfully contesting the city:-

- 'A man should be known'
- 'A man should be identified with the local, industrial and commercial operations of the district'
- 'A man should have definite and decided opinions'.⁵⁰

Having decided to contest the seat, pride dictated that he should do everything in his power to win. He was already a practised tactician; conspiracy and subterfuge were, so to speak, second nature given his long experience of gunrunning for the Italians. In the circumstances, it is no surprise that he should make secret preparations to secure his selection, stealing a march on the Liberals and thereby strengthening his negotiating position. He had grown accustomed to being in absolute control. Liberal colours, if he accepted them, would have to be on his terms.

Effectively then, Cowen's rise to power was greatly facilitated by his smart middle class credentials and his noteworthy experience in local government. His eligibility for office in terms of family, wealth and status were all that could be desired, and yet, given his outspoken advocacy of republican principles, the Liberal Association would almost certainly have looked elsewhere for a representative. The deciding factor was his undoubted influence upon the working classes which, in their judgement, far outweighed the political capital their opponents, or even their own supporters, might

make of Cowen's republicanism.⁵¹ His popularity with the Tyneside people simply could not be ignored, especially at a time when wooing the newly enfranchised electors was at the top of every political agenda. The other Liberal candidate, T.E.Headlam, was patently inept, railed by his opponents as a closet Tory with no demonstrable commitment to the locality or its inhabitants. In Cowen, they had a candidate who could secure the allegiances of more than just a faction or a class; his nomination, they believed, could indefinitely forestall the growing clamour for a working class candidate.

It is hardly a coincidence that the first working class M.P. should be a local man, Thomas Burt, the miner's leader selected to represent Morpeth in 1874.⁵² Cowen gave unstinting support to Burt's campaign through the pages of his newspapers and in numerous speeches. The Morpeth electorate, he noted, were mainly working men "determined to send one of their own body". Criticising the vested interests of many candidates, he argued that Burt would represent "not just a party or a section but the entire constituency"; he was unlikely to be "beguiled by the blandishments and brilliancy of power".⁵³ Keith Robbins' comment that 'from the 1870's onwards, 'Lib- Lab' M.P.'s appeared in a number of constituencies' masks the tortuously slow progress of political change.⁵⁴ Burt's election was exceptional, indicative only of the power of the Northumberland miners and their union, and the strength of local opinion. As a rule, working men encountered formidable opposition.⁵⁵ At the turn of the century, as George Bernstein's painstaking survey shows, less than 5% of Liberal M.P.'s could be described as having 'no obvious profession'.⁵⁶ In practice, prospective candidates were all too often dissuaded from standing, on the grounds that doing so would split the Liberal vote - a ploy used to great effect by Gladstone in 1880, when Hyndman relinquished his interest in the Marleybone seat.⁵⁷ Other hopefuls were recruited as paid agents "thus

preventing anything like united action".⁵⁸ Cowen, though, identified widespread prejudicial attitudes as the primary obstacle:

...the social usages and the customs of the Country, and, to a large extent, the prejudices of the English people who dearly, too dearly love a lord, have been the chief causes that kept political power in the hands of its present holders.⁵⁹

On Tyneside, the activities of the Gateshead Representation League exacerbated the incipient vulnerability of the Liberal executive. Formed to secure a "bona fide representative of labour for Gateshead", the League urged the working classes to select "a man of their own choosing, and one who will speak manfully, honestly and wisely on their behalf".⁶⁰ Ultimately, Cowen's candidacy offered a satisfactory solution to the dilemma: the established orthodoxy was mollified, convinced that the status quo was still being upheld. The lobby for working class representation, for their part, were more than content to back Cowen who, as a progressive radical, had professed a commitment to accelerating the pace of political reform.

Cowen's political power, as it derived from this other, non-traditional sphere of influence, can only be understood in the context of local radicalism. That Tyneside radicalism was as strong as ever in the 1870's was, as we have shown, in no small measure due to Cowen's activism and dynamic leadership. For him, keeping a radical tradition alive and in the forefront of the public mind had remained an overarching priority. As we have already observed, Cowen did not consider himself to be a Liberal. He was, first and foremost, an 'English Radical'; a believer in progress, he was "more concerned for liberal principles than for the Liberal Party" - the latter was simply an electoral necessity.⁶¹ He had his own working definition of English radicalism-

The original English Radicals were a school of politicians who went to the root of things, and fought for principle, irrespective of faction. They were in general sympathy with the Liberals, but in advance of and independent of them.⁶²

- and he was determined to resist at all costs the rising tide of "elastic and accommodating Liberalism which may mean this, that or t'other thing or anything or nothing" which threatened, he thought, to swamp radicalism.⁶³ Exasperated by the "political effeminacy and cowardice"⁶⁴ of the rising middle classes, he cautioned the working classes to be on their guard against complacency:

It is a very common practice for a man to be an earnest Radical when he is at the bottom of the ladder, but when he gets up in the world, procures a good shop and is able to live in an excellent house, he very often quits the Methodist meeting in order to attend church and gradually emerges a comfortable Whig. Let us not follow such a course.⁶⁵

Cowen lost no opportunity to press home his radical views or to stress his belief that radicalism was a far superior political faith, with a long established tradition and a greater commitment to progress and change.

Cowen's emergence as a formidable contender for power in 1873 cannot be simply ascribed to good timing, municipal largesse or accessibility to a partisan constituency - though clearly all three worked in his favour. His oratorical skills were a singular asset; his stirring speeches drew plaudits from even the most hostile audience. As Mr Grant, a leading member of the Liberal executive noted "his ability was such that, whenever he appeared, any opposition that might be brought against him would melt and be as nothing".⁶⁶ His reputation as a powerful orator extended far beyond the boundaries of the locality. Appraising Cowen's political career in 1893, the Lancashire Evening

Press claimed that, in his prime, his speeches "woke the country as if they had been a modern example of the Cross of Fire".⁶⁷ The London press were equally complimentary, as this comment from The Times shows: "He lifts politics...contrasting sharply with the second and third hand opinions which make up the staple of ordinary speeches".⁶⁸ And, as for the Birmingham radicals, they were, observed the St.James Gazette, completely outclassed:

At a time when machine made rhetoricians and political contractors hold their heads so high, it is well that the speeches of an Independent Radical, who has done more to maintain a high standard of political integrity in St.Stephens than all the Birmingham manipulators put together, should be collected and published.⁶⁹

Cowen pushed his advantage to its ultimate limit. Not only was he an accomplished orator, but he had effectively mastered the art of mass media. Even his opponents acknowledged that

He is a man of far more than average ability..his fervid eloquence is well calculated to bewitch the natives, and the powerful newspaper he has at his back more than doubles his personal influence, considerable as that is.⁷⁰

His astute proprietorship of the Chronicle newspapers secured a guaranteed audience for his political message.⁷¹ No expense was spared, as technical expertise was married to innovative journalistic methods, greatly extending the available readership and ensuring that the broadest possible cross section of society was familiarised with the political issues of the day. Sports reports, serialised literature, domestic anecdotes and local gossip were all offered as sweeteners to advance the Chronicle's more serious intent: that of giving the people a radical education. Special features, such as the series of articles on local cooperative societies in 1867,⁷² and the weekly portraits of mining villages in 1873,⁷³ promoted the view that mechanics' institutes, trades unions and coop stores were complementary to the adoption of radical

principles. And, in the process, these isolated villages were encouraged to consider themselves as an important section of the Tyneside community. As W.E.Adams, editor of the Newcastle Weekly Chronicle, observed in 1863 "the press became the adjunct of the platform".⁷⁴ In Cowen's capable hands, the Newcastle Daily Chronicle became a powerful political weapon:

It is read by opponents as well as friends. It influences all readers. It is powerful because dogmatic. If it changes politics, it changes the politics of a city and a district. It is the most powerful leader in the Northern Counties, men or newspaper.⁷⁵

Political and social reform groups were all assured of generous and sympathetic coverage. The positive intervention of the Cowenite press was particularly significant during the Nine Hours Strike in 1871,⁷⁶ and the 1873 campaign by the Northern Reform League to press the claims of local miners anomalously excluded from the franchise.⁷⁷ Moreover, as Chapter 4 has already shown, Irish issues and news were given an exceptional amount of space, prompting the United Irishman to claim, with some justification, that "...not even the Irish press could have given the Irish cause so strong a sounding board".⁷⁸ While other Liberal newspapers assiduously trod the party line, Cowen's newspapers adopted a singularly independent editorial policy. Naturally, this provoked a certain amount of animosity among the local party faithful. Attempts to engineer a partnership between the Liberal Association and the Cowen press failed miserably. Cowen was well aware that his ownership of the Chronicle newspapers was a vital factor in his continuing political authority and he was not about to give the Liberals any opportunity to undermine his independence. By 1882, the anti-Cowen lobby were finally forced into financing another newspaper in a desperate bid to secure more favourable coverage of Liberal policy.⁷⁹

Cowen's political message was thus widely disseminated, given an impact far beyond the scope of the public platform. More than this, Cowenite Radicalism found a responsive chord in the minds of the Tyneside people because his radicalism was not empty rhetoric. The moral convictions underpinning his speeches were given vivid realisation through all his many activities, political and social, and the people responded accordingly. Spanning two generations, he was actively involved in every campaign and movement of local importance; through his family connections he could legitimately claim over fifty years commitment to the struggle for reform. Dynastic claims to power, in this way, operated just as effectively in the new sphere of influence as they had in the old. Cowen's personal involvement in the organisational life of the Tyneside working class community demonstrably had a cumulative effect in building up his extraordinary power base.⁸⁰

Vincent, quite rightly, focuses on leadership as the key to explaining Liberal popularity. "The ordinary M.P.", he insists, had little influence on public opinion, "he simply gave the picture of a very rich man addressing poor men on subjects not of burning interest to either side".⁸¹ 'Tribunes', such as Bright, Chamberlain and Mill are said to have been the true leaders of opinion; winning over the radical lobby and taming the working class movement, they successfully allied both to the parliamentary Liberal Party. Cowen, though, was no 'ordinary politician'. His appeal was broad and direct, both speech and dress unequivocally signalling his identification with the working class electorate. His informal attire and dialect laden speech hardly commended him to his fellow members of parliament. In the House of Commons, as a rule, ostentation ruled. On Tyneside, such 'eccentricity' was translated into a large share of the vote by those who were persuaded that he was, as he claimed, one of themselves.⁸² Bright, whom Vincent singles out as

the most important Tribune, had only minimal influence in the North East.⁸³ He never spoke publicly in Newcastle,⁸⁴ where his radical credentials were considered extremely suspect, as this letter to the Daily Chronicle shows:

Bright is no democrat. He is not even a Chartist...he asks for a rate paying franchise which would exclude hundreds of honest and intelligent citizens from the electoral register.⁸⁵

Cowen did invite Bright to address the Northern Reform Union in 1859 but, on both sides, this was purely a matter of courtesy.⁸⁶ Since the local radicals regarded Bright as a "cuckoo in the nest", Cowen was not disposed to press the issue.⁸⁷ As for Bright, working class audiences were never truly his forte and he appears to have studiously avoided them whenever possible.⁸⁸

Cowen's well established reputation as the 'Tribune of the North' should have earned him a place on Vincent's list of tribunes "...who built up the goodwill for which Gladstone lived to be the universal legatee".⁸⁹ His popularity grew naturally out of the precise character of his involvement in the radical movement. As Chapter 3 has shown, he gave generously of his time, energy and money: the direct, personal contact he maintained with a large number of mechanics' institutes; his willingness to travel to mining villages to promote the Northern Reform Union or to encourage the formation of cooperative societies; and his salutary mediation in trade union disputes, all generated considerable goodwill. Unusually for the times, Cowen gave politics a human face, effectively breaking through the old traditional barriers between politicians and voting public. He was a familiar figure in their midst; as well known as 'The Blaydon Brick' as by his own name.⁹⁰ He was easily recognisable, not just in Blaydon or Newcastle but throughout the North East. This was personality politics on a powerfully intimate level, made even

more meaningful by Cowen's insistence upon 'flying the Tyneside flag' at every conceivable opportunity. His politics were given an unashamedly local colouration and, in return, his radical reputation became the flagship of regional pride. Employing the emotive language of radical patriotism, Tyneside, not Britain, was cited as the "birthplace of liberty".⁹¹ And, given such local emphasis, patriotism could remain the ideological property of the Tyneside radicals long after 1870, when Cunningham detects the disintegration of the patriotic left.⁹²

At this point, the question to be raised is whether Cowen can legitimately be defined as a charismatic leader. Weberian criteria requires the supposed charismatic leader to be sufficiently free from economic restraint to develop independent judgement, based on his own "freely chosen" convictions. Independence, according to this definition, is essential: 'Weber's leader is an individualist; the source of his actions lies in himself, in his own personal convictions and not in his following or associates'.⁹³ On these grounds the definition can certainly be convincingly applied. Moreover, if we accept the argument that

The extension of the franchise brought with it personalisation of politics, and weighted the scales in favour of the outstanding individual who was capable of securing the mass vote by force of personality and demagogic appeal.⁹⁴

it is perfectly reasonable to assert that Cowen, no less than Gladstone, met the challenge posed. A recent study of nineteenth century Liberalism supports the view that Cowen 'was much more than a provincial demagogue' and highlights his 'exasperating spirit of independence'.⁹⁵ In doing so, however, Biagini draws a sharp contrast between the phenomenon of 'being Gladstonized' by the Liberal leader's hypnotic rhetoric⁹⁶ and the charismatic impact of Cowen's

'didactic rationalism'.⁹⁷ This approach is judged to have been wholly appropriate to the 'Puritan mass intellectualism of the Northern counties.'⁹⁸ Cowen, as we have noted, was a masterly tactician and while it is clearly understood that charisma was bestowed, not possessed, he could deliberately engage in the sort of activity most likely to produce the required act of recognition. Thus, his 'missionary' tours of mining villages can be usefully equated with the ritual journeys made by Kings in a bid to confirm the sphere of their special authority ('making appearances, attending fetes, conferring honours, exchanging gifts or defying rivals, they mark it, like some wolf or tiger spreading his scent through his territory').⁹⁹ Most crucially, as Clifford Geertz suggests, the most 'flamboyant' charismatic figures are often heretics, who challenge the strength of the existing leadership or social order - who are 'at some distance from the center' and 'want very much to be closer'.¹⁰⁰ If Geertz is correct, and there is a central paradox within charisma embodying both orthodoxy and heresy, then it is the latter, more extreme form that can most usefully be applied to Cowen and his leadership of local radicalism.¹⁰¹

To attribute Cowen's popularity to any specific campaigns might, with good reason, be considered somewhat specious, and yet there are good grounds for doing so. His involvement in Cooperation and education reform were both vitally important. Education had always been a pivotal principle of Cowen's political strategy. He believed that the best way to help people was "to teach them to help themselves" and he roundly condemned the sort of charity which "...generates a sense of arrogance on the one hand, and a sense of subservience on the other".¹⁰² Disraeli, he complained, aspired only to keep the people in "a sort of well fed slavery".¹⁰³ Chapter 3 has already charted the rise of Cooperation in the North East and appraised Cowen's role

as prime mover and architect of the local movement which, by 1873, could boast a membership of 36,354 in Northumberland and Durham.¹⁰⁴ It is the act of leadership which is relevant here. The crossover of membership between cooperatives, mechanics' institutes and temperance groups has obvious implications for the extent of Cowen's leadership, as it provided the focal point at which all these diverse interests could converge. His presidency of the 1873 Cooperative Congress gave him a powerful platform from which to promote his plan to establish a 'militant democracy'. His ambitious idealism proved enormously attractive. By then, he had created a political void that only he could fill. His ability was unquestionable, his stature firmly established - not least through his involvement in education reform.

Prior to 1868, Cowen's educational initiatives had been more or less confined to the voluntary sphere, reflecting his belief that innovations such as free public libraries "would contribute as much, if not more, to the promotion of popular education".¹⁰⁵ But, by the autumn of 1869, radical interest in education reform began to gather considerable momentum. This was hardly surprising for, as Cowen noted

It had always been a cardinal point of Radical doctrine that whenever the people got the extension of the suffrage, the first use they would make of it would be to establish a system of education.¹⁰⁶

Despite his earlier misgivings, he responded generously to the Birmingham Radicals' request for assistance in setting up the National Education League, accepting an executive position in January 1870.¹⁰⁷ Using his vast network of radical contacts, he compiled a valuable register of known sympathisers to whom appeals for money and support could most profitably be made.¹⁰⁸ Newcastle, once again, became the focus of radical activity when the very first Education

Conference was convened at the Literary and Philosophical Society in November 1869. A heated debate ensued. The National Education Union, dominated by clerics, were enraged by the League's proposal for secular education.¹⁰⁹ Notwithstanding the notable decline in church attendance, public opinion was still markedly hostile to secular ideas.¹¹⁰ Although Cowen was sympathetic to the Secularist's position, he had to tread warily. In the event, the education issue provided him with a golden opportunity to demonstrate his political mettle. In entering the lists as an advocate of 'non-sectarian' education, he emerged as remarkably even-handed, and this went some way towards placating the opposing factions. Under the School Board provisions of the 1870 Act, Cowen and his four colleagues (George Luckley, Isaac Lowthian Bell, Dr.J.H. Rutherford and Robert Spence Watson) formally identified themselves as 'Unsectarian' candidates. Cowen defended his stance on the grounds that

We cannot establish schools in this country that will be universally acceptable until they are made absolutely unsectarian. In schools supported by the rates there should be no doctrine peculiar to any church taught, and the unsectarian candidates go for the Bible being read, with any rational explanation of its contents; but, that being done, we are opposed to any denominational teaching, which should be carried out in the Church and the Sunday School. ...The attempt to establish denominational schools is an attempt to buttress up the National Church and establish half a dozen more. The same principle applied to this country would have to be applied to Ireland. They have abolished the Protestant State Church there, but would be called upon to re-establish the Roman Catholic Church. How they can insist upon this denominational system I cannot understand. The course is clear and ought to be taken without hesitation. Some of our friends are attempting to make this question a denominational question. In selecting candidates, they should not get on this sectarian tack at all. We have been trying to get rid of sectarian feeling for a long time, and by mingling together, to rub off the corners of prejudice, but this Education Act, which has many advantages but great defects, simply propagates those sectarian feelings which we endeavour to destroy. I and the gentlemen associated with me appeal to you as brother citizens, acquainted with your wants and wishes. If elected, we will not go to the Education Board as the representatives of any denomination, but to represent what we believe to be the interests of the town at large. While others battle for special

sects, we will battle for the common good.¹¹¹

With its stress on egalitarianism, Cowen's speech was a tremendous tour de force. As far afield as London, Derby and Birmingham, Cowen became much sought after as a guest speaker.¹¹² The Manchester and Salford League, "determined to make a success of it", pleaded with Cowen to address a branch meeting: "In order to do that, we require the names of men who are popular with the working people. Among such, none is more so than yourself".¹¹³ Similar appeals were made by the Middlesborough branch, who encountered strenuous opposition from 'the clerical party'. The working men, they said were "warming up to take a deep interest in this question".¹¹⁴

Liberal unity was deeply fractured by the education furore and this was further exacerbated by the entrenched militancy of Chamberlain and the League. Why Cowen should actively intervene on Gladstone's behalf is unclear, although at this stage he does seem to have held the Liberal premier in high regard: "I know no man who ever guided the councils of this country who was more worthy of our admiration and confidence".¹¹⁵ It is quite possible that Foster presented a more satisfactory sacrificial lamb, given his ill-considered hostility to Garibaldi in 1864. Foster, in any case, was the minister responsible for shaping the Bill, and he could legitimately be expected to shoulder the blame for its divisive effects.¹¹⁶ Gratitude for his father's knighthood cannot be ruled out either. As a motivating factor, it may well have tipped the balance in Gladstone's favour. For whatever reason, Gladstone's leadership was given stirring defence by the Chronicle which took up the clarion call for Liberal unity.¹¹⁷ Relations between Cowen and the League became correspondingly cooler. On the eve of the 1873 Election, Cowen appeared to be not just pro-Gladstone but a stout defender of party loyalty. The education controversy, which proved to be a major factor in the Liberal

roul of 1874,¹¹⁸ served Cowen very well, providing him with an impressive domestic campaign from which to launch his parliamentary career. And, in the absence of any pressing foreign affairs, Cowen's militant republicanism could more easily be pushed into the background. It is remarkably ironic, then, that the very campaign which so positively assisted his rise to power should also carry with it the seeds of his downfall. The caucus system, which set Cowen on a collision course with the Liberal Party, was actually spawned in the aftermath of 1874, by the oligarchy which rapidly assumed control of the Newcastle School Board.¹¹⁹ In 1873, with the traditionalists in one pocket, and the non-traditionalists in the other, Cowen stood perfectly poised at the crossroads of political change. The question was 'how long could this unholy alliance last'?

When Cowen finally took centre stage as Liberal member for Newcastle, he confidently assumed he had the people's mandate to express his own political judgement. Satisfied that his views had been given a thorough airing, he regarded the electoral victory as formal confirmation that "his views were in consonance with those of the people."¹²⁰ His claim was this: "Whatever may be found in me, no man shall say he voted for me under a misapprehension".¹²¹ There was no question, in his mind, of relinquishing the right to act independently. "An M.P.", he insisted "is a representative, not a delegate.

He has to exercise and express his judgement on many conflicting topics. He is not chosen to vote on a single subject, or set of subjects, in a specified manner...A member of the House of Commons cannot be a delegate, in the course of a session, sudden and unexpected emergencies are constantly arising, scores of issues are being started on most diverse projects, upon which no man could, however willing he may be to do so, collect the opinion of his constituents. The work of a member, therefore, is different from and more elastic than that of a delegate. If he is only to vote to order, a machine could do as good, black and white balls

would be as good and a great deal less costly than living Whig or Tory members.¹²²

The viability of Cowen's determination to resist party discipline merits careful consideration, not least because it is an aspect of Victorian politics which requires more precise definition. Samuel Beer has argued that 'the golden age of the private M.P.' was over by 1868, implying that, by then, independence was not a realistic option.¹²³ In contrast, a recent study of mid Victorian politics concludes that the truly independent member was 'not unconformable, but incorruptable; virtuous rather than free'.¹²⁴ Declarations of independence, in that sense, can be regarded as an integral part of electoral formalities: the expected reaffirmation of the member's integrity and social standing. Employing this definition, Gurowich can, with some justification, insist that party membership was not incompatible with political independence.¹²⁵ However, he is also prepared to acknowledge that the desirability of having and keeping a government in power was a restraining influence and, in the final analysis, operated as a powerful incentive to vote along party lines.

Equally, Peter Jones has noted in his study of Leicester that it was not until after 1880 that 'party began to replace status as a key factor to gain office'.¹²⁶ This was certainly the case in Newcastle. Cowen was not shackled by the usual requirement to sacrifice his autonomy for the sake of party concerns, for his source of power did not depend upon Liberal largesse or sponsorship. Obligation, such as it was, rested with the Liberal Association. A man of inordinate (some might even say intemperate) pride, Cowen refused categorically to canvass for support. Addressing a School Board meeting in 1871, he explained:

I never have canvassed for anything for myself, and never intend to do so. I am sufficiently well known in Newcastle and therefore offer my services if they are appreciated. But if the electors can find better men, I will bow to their decision. Indeed, as a matter of personal feeling I would rather have been out of the election, but having been selected to stand with the others, I felt I could not decline the responsibility. Canvassing, however, I regard as a humiliating position, and whatever the consequences may be, I will not adopt such a course.¹²⁷

Even in 1885, when his position had become virtually untenable, he remained obdurate. Having had power 'thrust upon him', as it were, he felt justified in wielding it according to his lights.

For the vast majority, who were wholly dependent upon their local party, independence was never truly a viable position. The autonomy of even professed radicals seems to have been severely circumscribed. Writing to Josephine Butler in 1882, Cowen expressly attributed the failures of Gladstone's second Ministry to the undue pressure placed on Liberal members to vote with their party

If there had been a band of independent Liberals in the house, however numerically small, they might have done something to arrest or restrain the course of the Ministry...as it is, the majority follow the Government blindly and without question.¹²⁸

As for the hated Cloture proposal, a guillotine measure aimed at preventing obstruction tactics, there were, he claimed, at least fifty members who would have voted against it "if they had been free".¹²⁹

Cowen's subsequent collision with mainstream Liberalism can be located in the inability of either side to negotiate a satisfactory compromise on the vital question of independence. The Newcastle Liberal Association mistakenly assumed that Cowen's acceptance of the candidacy represented a commitment to national policy, interpreted locally by their executive. Cowen, for his part, fatally miscalculated the degree to which the Association had

been won over by his Ultra-radical ideas. Radicalising the Tyneside electorate was one thing, converting the party faithful to his strident militant democracy was quite another. Cowen's avowed aim to

...link past tradition with future hope and subordinate the interest of party to that of nation, the interest of classes to that of justice, the interest of section to that of liberty, and the interest of all to the elevation of man.¹³⁰

was unlikely to appeal to the Executive, dominated as they were by a small clique of wealthy, ambitious manufacturers, who were

...all close acquaintances, members of the same club, and in particular they all belong to the same radical school of politics, and, for the most part, the same radical school of theology and the same clan of closely allied families...An independent Liberal was more objectionable than a Tory, for free thinking in politics was of all sins, the most unpardonable...¹³¹

Unfortunately, the onset of a prolonged illness in the crucial period after the election prevented Cowen from taking his seat until the closing months of the parliamentary session, and seriously restricted his attendance the following year.¹³² Although it cannot be positively confirmed, the evidence suggests that he was suffering from severe nervous exhaustion. His doctors advised him to retire.¹³³ The Liberal Executive, dominated by the ambitious and influential Spence Watson, took full advantage of the power vacuum created by Cowen's protracted recuperation. The irony, is that the subsequent shake up of party organisation seems to have been precipitated, in the first instance, by comments in the Cowen press which attributed the general Liberal defeat to a weak party structure.¹³⁴ In Cowen's absence, Spence Watson's control of the Liberal Association noticeably tightened. His stature was further enhanced by his close collaboration with Chamberlain and

Bright in establishing the National Liberal Federation.¹³⁵ The ad hoc inform-
-ality, which had epitomised the local Liberal Association for so many years,
was rapidly replaced by a more formalised, disciplined structure - sarcastic-
-ally dubbed 'the Caucus' by its opponents, who viewed it as an unwanted
American import. Speaking at the Manchester Free Trade Hall, Cowen readily
acknowledged the need for change but he advised caution, arguing that if
pushed too far the new party machinery would prove "despotic".¹³⁶ He was
already too late, and by 1885, his worst fears had been confirmed. In a two
pronged attack, the cloture and the Caucus had effectively muzzled independent
members. Cowen was frankly dismayed by what he regarded as its retrogressive
effects:

...those who support the caucus system will effectively organise
all spontaneity, intrepidity and initiative out of the people... This
stereotyping men into systems is a prostitution of national
aspiration, a violation of human liberty, an encroachment on
individual life and a barrier to progress.¹³⁷

E. Biagini has argued that opposition to the Caucus emanated from 'old fashioned
plebeian radicalism',¹³⁸ and that many workers and radicals were actually in
favour of a reformed party organisation.¹³⁹ He claims that its critics,
especially Cowen, were motivated by personal animus, directed at the Federation's
personnel 'rather than the organisation itself'.¹⁴⁰ But if we accept the
sincerity of Cowen's opinion of the Caucus, that it was fundamentally wrong,
it is clear that he would not have drawn any distinction between the system
itself and those who actively promoted it.

With such entrenched views on either side, conflict was inevitable.
The vexed issue of party discipline first came to a head over the important
question of foreign policy in the Near East. The brutal massacre of 15,000
Bulgarians in May 1876, at the hands of Muslim irregulars acting on Turkish

orders, provoked unprecedented public outrage. Mass demonstrations, protesting against the pro-Turkish policy of the Disraeli government, rapidly gathered momentum in an agitation which, with its sectarian and moral overtones, divided as it consumed popular opinion. There is little doubt that the agitation was fuelled by graphic and ghoulish newspaper reports, especially in the North, where W.T.Stead, editor of the Northern Echo, mounted a relentless campaign.¹⁴¹ According to Richard Shannon, it was Stead, recognising the need for a 'mighty name' to endorse the movement, who petitioned Gladstone to emerge from his self imposed retirement and personally intervene.¹⁴² Other evidence, however, suggests that A.J. Mundella's influence was far greater for he was "widely blamed for stirring up Our Chief to this insubordinate act".¹⁴³ In any event, Shannon is right to insist that Gladstone 'was practically carried into the agitation by others'.¹⁴⁴ Political opportunism, not altruism, is said to have inspired his pamphlet The Bulgarian Horrors and the Question of the East, in a bid to 'restore the rapport between himself and the masses which the defeat of 1874 had snapped'.¹⁴⁵

At the start of the crisis, with parliament in recess, Cowen was recuperating in the Vosges and this possibly accounts for Newcastle's unusually slow response to Stead's rallying cry.¹⁴⁶ Notwithstanding Gladstone's reputedly cool reception of Cowen at Westminster, relations between them, at this point, were cordial. On his return, he promptly endorsed Gladstone's proposal for Bulgarian independence. It would, he said, "best commend itself to intelligent Englishmen".¹⁴⁷ And, in his constituency speech in January 1877 his praise was unstinting. "History", he said, would be the final judge:

...then will the work of that great Englishman, who is at once the animating and directing spirit of that assembly, be appreciated and the petty detractions of pygmy politicians will be consigned to oblivion.¹⁴⁸

Within three months, however, the Russian invasion of Turkey caused Cowen to radically reappraise the situation and, significantly, to reverse his opinion of Gladstone. Whereas, in September 1876, he had been convinced that Russian expansionism was "an exploded illusion", by the Summer of 1877 the tone of his 'London Letter' had become increasingly alarmist.¹⁴⁹ Taken to task by Spence Watson for his Russophobic bellicosity, Cowen foolishly feigned innocence, disingenuously claiming that "I have not read our London Letter once for the past month. I have not read a letter in the Chronicle for three months".¹⁵⁰ The Cowen Papers testify to the tight control Cowen exercised over the contents of his newspapers, and Spence Watson would not have been fooled by his unconvincing disclaimer. As Cowen showed no signs of toeing the party line, relations between the two long standing friends became increasingly strained.¹⁵¹ Meanwhile, at the Chronicle Offices, Cowen found himself equally at odds with his editors, James Annand and W.E.Adams. Adams radical credentials ensured Cowen's respect, if not his agreement, and he was able to uphold the official Gladstonian line unhindered. Annand was not nearly so fortunate. When he succumbed to illness, Cowen manipulated the situation to extract his resignation, suggesting that the editorship of the Daily Chronicle was too arduous.¹⁵² Adams was given considerable freedom as editor of the Weekly Chronicle, but for the Daily Chronicle to express dissident views was unthinkable. In the final analysis, the Daily was the more powerful leader of opinion and, more importantly, it was widely regarded as Cowen's political signature.

Cowen seemed undeterred by his political isolation. Even though some of his closest friends were prepared to stand with Gladstone on the Eastern Question, he persisted in publicly denouncing Russia as "an aggressive,

military, ecclesiastical autocracy...dangerous to human freedom, peace and progress".¹⁵³ When Cowen proposed that party considerations be laid aside in the interests of national unity, the two men clashed angrily in the Commons. Gladstone emphatically denied that Liberals were required "to prefer party to country...

To do so would be a great and gross mistake, but not a greater mistake than that made by my Hon.Friend himself when he said that in a question of foreign policy, we are to surrender to their opinion and judgement and simply to support that which might be proposed by Ministers - that amounted to this, that in questions of foreign policy we are to have no regard to right and wrong; that we are all to be Englishmen and that whatever proposal is made in the name of England we are to support. Such a proposa as that is most shallow in philosophy and most unwise in policy.¹⁵⁴

In reply, Cowen protested that his words had been gravely misinterpreted:

A man speaking under strong emotions ought not to be made an offender for a word. If that rule were applied to the right hon. gentleman, he would have a good deal to answer for.

Defending his stance, he went on

When national interests were imperilled - national existence possibly at stake - then we should close our ranks and forget that we are Whigs, Tories and Radicals; remember only that we are Englishmen and present a united front to the world. ...The general principles of national action - whether we are to put up a monarchy in one country or destroy a Republic in another - whether we are to be partisans in a strife or neutrals - must be decided by the people, and by them alone. But the policy having been assented to, its execution must be left to the executive. If they blunder, you may censure them, dismiss them or impeach them; but in a moment of national peril, do not paralyse their movements by unnecessary complications.¹⁵⁵

According to Jane Cowen, "the Old Man never forgave him, and after his speech in the Commons in February 1878, he practically cut him".¹⁵⁶ From that time onwards, Cowen was deeply critical of Gladstone, insisting that the Bulgarian

Atrocities had been "turned to party purposes".¹⁵⁷ Writing to C.H.de Bille M.P. in June 1880, he reiterated his belief that Gladstone's Eastern policy had been dangerously unwise:

I am more than ever satisfied that the course Mr.Gladstone advocated was fraught with much danger, not only to England but to European liberty.He is a perfectly sincere man, but on this subject his judgement is warped by a bias, partly ecclesiastical and partly personal.¹⁵⁸

For both politicians, the Eastern crisis proved to be something of a watershed. In Gladstone's case, its effects may be said to have been wholly beneficial, enabling him to capture the high moral ground from Beaconsfield which, in turn, effected his successful return to national politics as Liberal premier.¹⁵⁹ For Cowen, though, the failure to compromise or even moderate his views had disastrous consequences. In distancing himself so decisively from his fellow radicals, any possibility of his becoming their chosen leader was destroyed¹⁶⁰ - and this at a time when the 1880 Election victory indicated that the political initiative was about to pass to the radical left. Chamberlain, who had, as ever, played his hand more skilfully, was the ultimate beneficiary. Cowen 's public disagreement with Gladstone was extremely damaging, especially in the wake of his resumed premiership and increased popular support.

In the main, the Newcastle Liberals favoured Gladstone's return to politics, sending him a loyal address at the start of his crucial Midlothian campaign.¹⁶¹ Cowen's antagonism, then, must have been a source of acute embarrassment to his local party, who were also sharply disappointed by his conspicuous failure to ingratiate himself at Westminster. The Liberal Association, however, were all too aware of the strength of Cowen's popularity with the ordinary electorate and were in no position to discipline or replace

him. Cowen acknowledged, willingly enough, that his behaviour had been "a source of trouble and annoyance" and on several occasions he offered to resign but this was repeatedly declined.¹⁶² In view of the widening chasm between Cowen and Spence Watson this, more than anything else, demonstrates the degree to which Liberal success at the local level, even in 1880, depended on Cowen. The decision to field Ashton Dilke (brother of the radical M.P., Sir Charles Dilke) as second candidate in 1880 was part of Spence Watson's long term strategy to secure a more malleable representative. Supremely confident, Cowen scorned the suggestion that he share a platform with Dilke.¹⁶³ With the inimitable backing of the Chronicle, he was returned at the head of the poll (11,766 : 10,404), having fought the campaign as an independent candidate. Undisputably, his victory was a personal vote of confidence and a declaration of faith in Cowenite Radicalism. His independent candidacy had finally exonerated him of any lingering sense of obligation to the local Liberals. Before very long, Cowen's outspoken criticism of the Government's Irish policy was causing further furore.

According to Shannon, who believes that the Bulgarian Atrocities kindled Gladstone's awareness of the plight of the Irish, 1876, not 1886, was the crucial year for the Liberal Party.¹⁶⁴ The radical destiny of the Liberal Party was, he argues, fatally subverted by Gladstone's triumphant return. By championing the Irish cause in preference to the 'standing interests of Liberal politics', Gladstone alienated Chamberlain and 'radicalism was wounded mortally'.¹⁶⁵ The issue was, though, rather more complex than Shannon suggests. Gladstone's newly discovered obsession with Irish reform was not as altruistic as it appeared for, as Michael Bentley points out, unifying the Whig and radical factions was a primary consideration, particularly in the light of the growing threat posed by the ascendant National Liberal Federation.¹⁶⁶ And

there was also the key issue of Irish votes which had been pledged to secure the election victory, on the unwritten understanding that the Irish question would be dealt with sympathetically and generously.¹⁶⁷ There can be no quarrel with Bentley's assessment that 'The Ministry began with Ireland, it became, at least publicly, obsessed with Ireland; it destroyed itself over Ireland'.¹⁶⁸ That being said, the tendency to put Gladstone into the driving seat over Home Rule assumes an intuitive sympathy with Irish affairs that was, in fact, noticeably lacking. Compared with Cowen he appears, if anything, to have been an extremely reluctant crusader.

Gladstone's visit to Ireland in October 1877 has been frequently cited as evidence of his growing interest in, and commitment to, Irish reform but the underlying stimulus was essentially negative.¹⁶⁹ The unwelcome opposition of Irish Nationalists to his Eastern policy ultimately forced the Irish issue on to his political agenda. Undoubtedly, as Shannon says, the Eastern Question 'helped him on to what was later done' but the attempt to gloss over Gladstone's disinclination to act positively, until events overtook him and forced his hand, is far from convincing.¹⁷⁰ Gladstone, it seems, shrank from the idea that there could be a close correlation between the plight of the Bulgarians and that of the Irish.¹⁷¹ Cowen, in stark contrast, had no such qualms. Addressing the Commons in February 1878, he drew the unpalatable analogy in his customary forthright style:

When we recall the ferocity - for no other word will express it - with which Ireland was, and with which Poland is ruled, we should manifest some moderation in our denunciation of the Turks. I repeat that Governments as venal, as tyrannical, as lawless and as lazy as our allies, and with our own record in Ireland in the past, and in India more recently, English politicians should not be so ready to rush into hysterics over Turkish delinquencies.¹⁷²

As we have shown, the presence of a large Irish population on

Tyneside had contributed, in no small measure, to the perceived resilience and strength of local radicalism. Cowen's prompt denunciation of Irish oppression reflected his long standing sympathy for the Irish people; a sympathy that had, moreover, been given visible expression through his close friendships with Irish Nationalists, his willingness to give Irish affairs unprecedented coverage in his newspapers and his efforts to bring about radical Irish reforms. Whether Cowen was actually mixed up in Fenian activity would be difficult to prove; as with all his clandestine dealings, he covered his tracks very well. But it would be strange indeed if the sophisticated system Cowen personally devised for smuggling arms, men and seditious literature on behalf of Polish and Italian patriots had not, likewise, been made available to local Irish nationalists. Cowen's vigorous campaign to effect the release of the Fenian prisoners is, in itself, revealing. The very manner in which he expressed himself would seem to betray the direction in which his sympathies lay. Addressing the House in August 1876, he made no attempt to denounce them. Instead, he accused the government of inconsistency. How was it possible, he enquired

...to patronise and pension rebellious Russian soldiers and, at the same time, punish with such merciless severity a handful of Irish soldiers who had done exactly the same thing as their brother rebels from Poland? If the Home Secretary can explain the difference of it, it is more than I can do...¹⁷³

The sheer determination of the Irish people drew Cowen's unqualified admiration and generous assistance: "United Irishmen, Young Irelanders and Fenians; Repealers, Home Rulers and Nationalists - what are they all but the collective intuition of the people under emotion."¹⁷⁴

Cowen visited Ireland on a number of occasions, most notably in 1876, when following his election he was invited to sit on a Royal Commission

investigating the state of British Agriculture.¹⁷⁵ It was this kind of first hand knowledge that enabled Cowen to speak so authoritatively whenever he addressed the House on Irish affairs.¹⁷⁶ Following his return from one such visit in August 1880, he urged other members to go and see for themselves the intolerable misery and suffering which, he claimed, lay at the root of Irish violent rebellion. He had, he said, "witnessed in the West of Ireland scenes of wretchedness and squalor such as it would be difficult to match in any country in the North of Europe".¹⁷⁷

The Democratic Federation, of which Cowen was a founder member, aimed at its inception in June 1881 to oppose "the monstrous tyranny of Mr. Gladstone and his Whigs in Ireland".¹⁷⁸ In collaboration with the Federation, Cowen organised a deputation of working men from Newcastle to visit the south and West of Ireland and "report on the state of the peasantry".¹⁷⁹ Land ownership was a key issue around which Irish nationalists and members of the Democratic Federation could rally.¹⁸⁰ For a short time, the two groups worked harmoniously together, holding joint meetings until, under Hyndman's direction, the Federation became more explicitly socialist.¹⁸¹ Cowen was one of the first to quit the group. He had little time for Socialism and even less time for Communism, as these comments show:

...Society regulated in detail and petrified in form, as Communism would make it, would reduce man to a cypher, or to a machine. His free will, his personal merit, his never ceasing aspirations towards new modes of progress would disappear. it would be the serfdom of the Middle Ages without the hope of Manumission. All that the state can do, all that it is desirable it should do, is to secure to everyone fair ground for equal effort and leave the rest to the individual, to his application and his aptitudes.¹⁸²

The period of collaboration was not wasted, however. Hyndman lent his considerable weight to the Irish cause. Both he and Cowen were appointed as executives

of the National Land League of Great Britain, alongside Parnell, Biggar, Barry, Healy and J.M.McCarthy.¹⁸³ Newcastle, which had proved so successful a host for the first convention of the Home Rule Federation in 1873,¹⁸⁴ was chosen as the venue to launch the National Land League.¹⁸⁵ Addressing the massed crowds, Healy praised Cowen and told them that "...so long as one Englishman had not bowed the knee to Baal, there was still trust and confidence and hope in the Irish people for the people of England".¹⁸⁶

Cowen's tireless denunciation of Gladstone's coercion policy throughout 1881 earned him the unqualified support of the Irish members. As far as the Liberals were concerned, his actions provoked a torrent of vituperative animosity. But, though he found himself in "a helpless, hopeless minority", he remained unrepentant, undaunted even by the flood of abusive and threatening mail which he received:

I have deemed it to be my duty to differ from the leader of the Liberal Party on great questions of public policy, and a set of silly, weakminded persons have imagined that they could threaten me or coerce me into abandoning my convictions, or changing my course of action. Possibly by this time, they have discovered that that is not practicable...The government are too fond of coercion. They are coercing the Turk, coercing the Basulo, and now they want to coerce the Irish. They have coerced the constituencies by their Caucuses and coerced parliament by their cloture...The present Ministry, if they do not alter their course, will be known as 'The Ministry of Coercion'.¹⁸⁷

With speeches such as these given full coverage in the Cowen Press, his popularity among the local Irish continued to act as a bulwark against the steady sloughing off of Liberal support. Countless appeals by the local Liberals were all met by the same flat refusal:

I mean to oppose the Coercion Bill on every occasion, at every point, by all the resources in my power. When all opportunity of defeating the principle of the Bill has gone, I will strive to

delay its operation by every honourable, fair and legitimate process. When that resource is exhausted, I will assist in mitigating the harshness of its clauses and minimising the despotic powers that the Government are seeking to obtain.¹⁸⁸

In resisting Irish coercion, Cowen claimed to have done "nothing more than sustain the honoured traditions of English Radicalism".¹⁸⁹ He railed against the Liberals who had proved to be nothing more than fair weather friends of the Irish people: "I leave these honourable gentleman to justify with their consciences and their constituents, these wholesale breaches of their solemnly recorded pledges".¹⁹⁰ Cowen was convinced that the Government's failure to deal effectively with the underlying cause of the Irish problem would produce difficulties that future generations would have to grapple with.¹⁹¹ Uncannily perceptive, Cowen warned "The Ministry do not know it, but they are laying up for themselves such a store of popular odium on this subject, as some day will astonish them".¹⁹² When the nationalists Davitt and Dillon were imprisoned, Cowen sprang to their defence, arguing that "You cannot kill ideas by chains and prisons, and the attempt to annihilate them by pains and penalties will fail".¹⁹³ It was obstruction tactics by the Parnellites, ably abetted by Cowen and a handful of radicals, which precipitated the enactment of the cloture. Cowen insisted upon his right to speak "as I am one of that section of members that the rule was designed to put to silence", and asked pointedly

Whose opinions are to be the expression of public will? The political lotus - eaters who dose away their days in sleepy Pall Mall clubs, or the opinion of the militant democracy in the North of England? ¹⁹⁴

P.A.Taylor, the member for Leicester, formally approved Cowen's stance, stating that "nothing could have made me vote for the cloture - not if every

voter in Leicester wished it". His critics, he said, were not ordinary working men who were "apt to stand by their principles".¹⁹⁵

The Newcastle Liberal Association, roundly condemning the "relentless, merciless, pitiless savagery" of Cowen's press campaign against Gladstone, sent a formal declaration of approval to the Premier, applauding both his coercion policy and the adoption of the cloture.¹⁹⁶ Gladstone's popularity and the rigorous discipline imposed by the Caucus ensured that all Cowen's efforts met with concerted opposition. Divisions among local Liberals had, by 1881, spawned an Anti-Cowen Association, grimly determined "to oppose the return of Mr Cowen at the next General Election".¹⁹⁷ In 1883, when Ashton Dilke became ill, John Morley (whom Cowen had recommended as a possible candidate some years earlier) was invited by Spence Watson to contest the seat.¹⁹⁸ Cowen declined to support Morley but, nevertheless, with Spence Watson's influence and assistance he won comfortably. Cowen was astonished and not a little dismayed that "a stranger to Newcastle would ever be elected in that way".¹⁹⁹ Morley, an avid supporter of the Government, was on friendly terms with both Gladstone and Chamberlain, and he subsequently became a great favourite among Newcastle Liberal activists. His relations with Cowen were scarcely polite while, in private, he confided to Spence Watson that he would "smash, pulverise and destroy him when the time comes".²⁰⁰ Cowen's supporters, who previously had accused Dilke of being Spence Watson's 'puppet' were no less enamoured of Morley, who hedged his bets over the Irish issue and voted against women's suffrage in 1884.²⁰¹

The row over Egypt and the Sudan, the threatened crisis over the Budget, and the ongoing saga of Irish rebellion bedevilled Gladstone's second Ministry. It is only remarkable that unity was preserved for a full term of office. A number of explanations have been proffered for Gladstone's sudden

volte-face on the question of Home Rule, the most convincing being that suggested by T.A.Jenkins.²⁰² He argues that Gladstone needed a new rationale for his continued premiership since his return to politics in 1880 had been mooted as only a temporary expedient. He was, therefore, bound to discover yet another "speciality which only he had the political expertise to deal with".²⁰³ Viewed as a leadership issue, the adoption of Home Rule makes a good deal of sense and this need not preclude arguments which stress the sea change in Gladstone's thinking, or the pressing need to unify Whig and Radical factions. What it does offer is a more realistic pecking order of the motivating factors.

With Home Rule as the reform ticket for the 1885 Election, Cowen's political future should have been secure and, in a sense, it was, in so far as all the available Irish votes were pledged on his behalf on Parnell's instructions. His position in Newcastle was, however, rapidly becoming untenable. He had relinquished his grip on the Liberal orthodoxy without even attempting to retain a modicum of influence. He still had many friends within Liberal circles, but they were not powerful enough to counter the formidable opposition that was being mounted against him. Cowen frankly acknowledged that the 'Liberal Association people' would plump for Morley and yet he calmly refused to canvass for support. Dogged with ill health, and obviously weary, he told the listening crowds that if he lost he would not complain: "He either fears his fate too much, or his desert too small/ Who dares not put it to the test, to win or lose it all."²⁰⁴

In the event, Cowen topped the poll (10,489 : 10,129) but was forced to confront the unpalatable reality that Tory votes had secured his victory. He determined to retire. Thanking his supporters for their "unsolicited approval", he declared

I was not stung into political life by penury and I dont remain in it for gain...the meanness, the implacability, the vindictiveness and the personal rancour of our local politicians have become unbearable and I have therefore resolved, notwithstanding the result of this election, not again to contest the city.²⁰⁵

Cowen's supporters urged him to reconsider, claiming with some justification that Morley had taken unfair advantage of his decision not to canvass: "His agents urged voters to plump for him as you would be receiving part Conservative and the whole of the Irish vote, and your election would be safe".²⁰⁶ Slaters Private Detection Agency wrote to Cowen, offering to investigate known cases of corruption but to no avail.²⁰⁷ In April 1886, the Newcastle Liberal Association voted overwhelmingly in favour of Home Rule ²⁰⁸- a policy which Cowen had long advocated, and they had so persistently opposed. Timing, which had been so much in his favour at the start of his career, deserted him at the end:

He has, in fact, in a large degree, educated the people of Newcastle on the question. And now, after he had prepared the ground and sowed the seed, Mr. John Morley (Irish Secretary) steps in and reaps the harvest. This is lucky, to say the least of it, for Mr. Morley. Had Mr. Cowen felt inclined, had he flattered Ministers, had he generally voted with his party, had he exercised less independence and shown less acrimony, he might have been Chief Secretary for Ireland, with a seat in the Cabinet.²⁰⁹

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4. J. Vincent: THE FORMATION OF THE BRITISH LIBERAL PARTY 1857-68 (1976) p 33
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16. E.F.Biagini & A.Reid: 'Currents of Radicalism' in volume of the same title op.cit distance themselves from interpretations that stress the 'irrational' motivation of Liberal politics in the 19th century, pp7-10.
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29. COWEN PAPERS various; Gateshead Poor Law Board of Guardians MINUTES 1845-1850; also see Chapter 1.
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31. Newcastle Corporation COUNCIL MINUTES 9.11.1865- 7.10.1868. Cowen was a regular attender at Council meetings, the vast majority of Council business fell under the jurisdiction of the Town Improvement Committee.
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33. R.Quinault: 'Joseph Chamberlain: A Reassessment' in Gourvish & O'Day (Eds) op.cit.
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42. For example, A.R.Ball: BRITISH POLITICAL PARTIES (1981), identifies Chamberlain as radicalism's 'most outstanding spokesman before 1886', p33; G.L.Bernstein LIBERALISM AND LIBERAL POLITICS IN EDWARDIAN ENGLAND (1986) claims that radicalism was 'largely the creation of Joseph Chamberlain' p9.

43. Quinault op.cit.p71.
44. E.I.Waitt: 'John Morley, Joseph Cowen and Robert Spence Watson: Liberal Divisions in Newcastle Politics 1873-95' Unpublished PhD thesis (Manchester) 1972, pp10f.
45. Ibid. T.E.Headlam was an influential Whig who had headed the poll in 1859 but was beaten into second place by Cowen Snr.in 1865.He was then ousted by Cowen in 1874 (8,464 votes to 5,807). Robert Spence Watson accused Cowen of duplicity in his REMINISCENCES 1837-1911 (1969 reprint) but he had acted as Cowen's election agent in 1873/4 and would have been an accomplice to any 'sharp practice'. His comments were, in any case, made after relations between them had soured.
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47. Ibid.
48. COWEN PAPERS B248 Speech at the Circus, Newcastle 28.1.1882.
49. COWEN PAPERS B157 30.12.1873.
50. Ibid.
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55. H.Pelling: THE ORIGINS OF THE LABOUR PARTY 1880-1900 (1965) p4.
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58. COWEN PAPERS B255 Satirical article from The People (newspaper cutting) 'Caucustown' 5.3.1882.
59. COWEN PAPERS B178 Speech at Clayton St. Ncle.18.10.1876.
60. COWEN PAPERS C1855 Circular of the Gateshead Representation League, undated but probably 1873(per archivist notation).
61. COWEN PAPERS various, including B198 Speech in the House of Commons 2.4.1879 B200 Speech at North Shields 3.12.1879.
62. COWEN PAPERS Letter Cowen to George Mitchell. Cowen's secretary added a note to the letter stating that Mitchell was well known to Potter, Odger, Shipton and Howell as 'one from the plough'.
63. COWEN PAPERS B210 nsp.cutting: Newcastle Daily Chronicle Report of a meeting in the Town Hall 4.1.1881.
64. COWEN PAPERS C1857 Northern Reform Union Conference at Manchester Free Trade Hall 19.12.1877.
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70. Newcastle Liberal Association MINUTES op.cit. Speech by Coun.Thomas Richardson.
71. O.R.Ashton op.cit. notes that Cowen bought the Daily Chronicle in 1859/60 and introduced the Weekly Chronicle in 1863; M.Milne: NEWSPAPERS IN NORTHUMBERLAND AND DURHAM makes the point that the Weekly attracted a large working class readership, whereas the Daily was mostly read by shopkeepers and skilled workers,p31; also see A.J.Lee: THE ORIGINS OF THE POPULAR PRESS 1855-1914 (1976) pp 135-6, 174.
72. Newcastle Weekly Chronicle beginning in March 1867.
73. Ibid. beginning in January 1873.
74. O.R.Ashton op.cit p104.
75. COWEN PAPERS F106: cutting from 'The Arrow' October 1898 Vol.2.(this was a

- monthly journal, printed in Gateshead).
- 76.see Chapter 3. for an account of the strike. Cowen contributed £80.00 per week to the strike fund, as well as paying the expenses of returning 'blacklegs' to Belgium and Germany.
 - 77.see Chapter 4. for a full account of the 1873 reform campaign.
 - 78.COWEN PAPERS B399 (nsp.cutting) 8.9.1984.
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 - 80.see Chapter 3.
 - 81.J.Vincent op.cit.p175.
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 - 124.P.M.Gurowich op.cit. p181.
 - 125.Ibid. p107.
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 - 149.Blaydon speech 30.9.1876; The London Letter was Cowen's regular column in the Daily which gave a diary of events from Westminster, with commentary.
 - 150.Corder op.cit.p220.
 - 151.O.R.Ashton op.cit. p133.
 - 152.E.I.Waitt thesis op.cit. p87; Shannon op.cit.pp230f; M.Milne op.cit. p107.
 - 153.J.Cowen Speeches op.cit., House of Commons 11.2.1878
 - 154.Ibid. The Preface to this speech is an extract from Gladstone's speech of the same date.
 - 155.Ibid. Cowen's reply to Gladstone.
 - 156.Jane Cowen Mss.op.cit.
 - 157.COWEN PAPERS B248 Speech at the Haymarket,Ncle. 28.1.1882.
 - 158.COWEN PAPERS Letter to C.H.de.Bille M.P., who had supported Cowen's policy on the Near East.
 - 159.Jenkins op.cit.p88.
 - 160.Ibid.p85.
 - 161.W.E.Gladstone: MIDLOTHIAN SPEECHES (1879) p18.
 - 162.Corder op.cit.p236.
 - 163.Newcastle Liberal Association Minutes op.cit.
 - 164.Shannon op.cit. p274.
 - 165.Ibid.p273; also Bernstein op.cit. p10.
 - 166.Bentley op.cit.p66; Jenkins op.cit.p277; A.B.Cooke & J.Vincent:

- THE GOVERNING PASSION p383.
167. the most comprehensive account of the Irish in Britain may be found in R. Swift & S. Gilley (Eds) THE IRISH IN BRITAIN 1815-1939 (1989), and by the same editors THE IRISH IN THE VICTORIAN CITY (1985).
 168. Bentley op.cit. p68.
 169. Jenkins op.cit. p280f; Shannon op.cit. p277.
 170. Shannon p276. Shannon is inclined to excuse Gladstone's slowness to act on the grounds that the analogy was 'distasteful'.
 171. Ibid. p280.
 172. J. Cowen Speeches op.cit 11.2.1878.
 173. COWEN PAPERS B176 2.8.1876; also B181 2.2.1877.
 174. COWEN PAPERS B379 speech by Cowen at Birmingham 17.6.1886.
 175. COWEN PAPERS F43 Letter Cowen to William Elliott June 1880.
 176. A.O'Day: THE ENGLISH FACE OF IRISH NATIONALISM (1977) p83, notes that, apart from the Northern boroughs, English members were largely ignorant of Ireland and its problems.
 177. COWEN PAPERS B207 Speech to H. of Commons 30.8.1881.
 178. H.M. Hyndman : RECORD OF AN ADVENTUROUS LIFE (1911), p246; Pelling op.cit. pp18f.
 179. Newcastle Daily Chronicle 3.9.1881; COWEN PAPERS F43 Letter Cowen to Thomas Seaton M.P., Dublin. The delegation were Bryson (NMA), Paterson (DMA), Mr Birkett, a Ncle. Engineer and Richard Ruddock, editor of the Chronicle. 1878-1908.
 180. COWEN PAPERS: B248 28.1.1882.
 181. Hyndman op.cit. pp255f.
 182. COWEN PAPERS B349 1885.
 183. for information about the The Land League see A.O'Day op.cit. p203;
 184. O'Day op.cit. p194.
 185. COWEN PAPERS B245 29.8.1881.
 186. COWEN PAPERS B246 29.8.1881.
 187. COWEN PAPERS B220 speech H. of Commons 8.2.1881.
 188. COWEN PAPERS B224 Letter Cowen to W.T. Martin of the Junior Liberal Club 10.2.1881.
 189. COWEN PAPERS B232 25.2.1881 Speech to H. of Commons.
 190. Ibid.
 191. COWEN PAPERS various including B263 7.7.1882; B248 28.1.1882.
 192. COWEN PAPERS B223 10.2.1881.
 193. COWEN PAPERS B242 10.5.1881.
 194. COWEN PAPERS B275 10.11.1882 'The Right Of Free Speech', later published as a pamphlet.
 195. COWEN PAPERS (nsp. cutting) B279 Midland Free Press 18.11.1882.
 196. Newcastle Liberal Association Minutes Extraordinary General Meeting 24.2.1882.
 197. COWEN PAPERS various B234-375; also Newcastle Liberal Association Minutes 31.12.1881.
 198. Corder op.cit. p223f.
 199. Hirst op.cit. p153.
 200. Corder op.cit. p170.
 201. Newcastle Daily Chronicle 25.3.1881.
 202. Jenkins op.cit. Chapter 7, summarises the main arguments of Cooke & Vincent.
 203. Jenkins op.cit. p248.
 204. COWEN PAPERS B340 27.11.1885 (quotation is from Montrose)
 205. Newcastle Daily Chronicle 30.12.1885. Open Letter to the Electorate by Cowen.

- 206.COWEN PAPERS F85 Letter William smith to Cowen 27.3.1886.
- 207.COWEN PAPERS B373 Letter from Slaters Private Detective & Enquiry Association London.to Cowen 14.4.1886.
- 208.COWEN PAPERS B373 Letter to Cowen from the Secretary of the Newcastle Liberal Association stating 516 members, out of a meeting of 520, had voted in favour of Home Rule,13.4.1886.
- 209.COWEN PAPERS B365 unidentified newspaper cutting, dated 12.2.1886.

CHAPTER 6: JOSEPH COWEN: FROM RADICALISM TO IMPERIALISM?

The singular consistency of Cowen's politics has been the recurring theme of this thesis which has attempted to trace a clear line of continuity between the earlier expression of Tyneside radicalism, epitomised by Thomas Spence, and the modified form so emphatically stamped in his own image. Charting the progress of local radicalism has been largely unproblematic, particularly as Cowen actively evinced his indebtedness to the earlier tradition. Notwithstanding the tactical adoption of Liberal colours for electoral purposes, Cowenite Radicalism remained the definitive expression of local politics until his retirement from national politics in 1886. However, his indomitable defence of radical principles, and dogged pursuit of radical goals, remains extremely difficult to reconcile with his subsequent imperialism. Cowen's commitment to the cause of Irish Nationalism earned him an almost unrivalled reputation as the champion of liberty and yet this would seem to be uniquely at odds with his resolute insistence upon British superiority and the concomitant right to defend the Empire at any cost, even by force if necessary. Although his was by no means a lone voice, the stark contrast with his former defence of oppressed minorities and eloquent condemnation of tyranny is considered particularly baffling and, as a recent biographer observes, makes "a confusion of his politics by 1885".¹

There are several pathways through this apparent confusion. In the first instance, Cowen's conversion to imperialism can be located in the prevailing climate of rising nationalism. As a man of letters, and a self-proclaimed advocate of progress, Cowen was always deeply influenced by the currency of nineteenth century ideas and philosophies. His speeches and writings display a ready familiarity and concurrence with those views which stressed the civilizing and christianizing influences of British rule. This was, almost

invariably, the principal justification he employed to explain his imperialist stance. And, however unpalatable, an element of racism cannot be entirely ruled out of his exegesis for this was a cardinal constituent of all imperialist writings.² The powerful strand of patriotism permeating radical thought throughout the period all too clearly fed into an emergent consensus that precise distinctions could be made between the colonies populated predominantly by members of the designated "Anglo-saxon brotherhood"³ and other imperial territories, primarily the sub-tropics, where indigenous barbarity and savagery were always stressed. As a self-styled radical patriot par excellence, Cowen fully endorsed the old maxim⁴ that patriotism was the "creed of opposition" with an absolute commitment to uphold English liberty and, as such, recognised no party boundaries. Supporting an imperial foreign policy and, by default, the Conservative Party, was thus easily legitimated. Far from invalidating his radical credentials, Cowen's political independence effectively enhanced his claim to be entirely consistent. Moreover, the seeming contradiction between Cowen's imperialism and his boundless admiration for the Irish cause is not nearly so incongruous as might be generally supposed. On the contrary, personal involvement in a number of nationalist struggles- Hungarian, Polish, Italian and Irish - might be regarded as a significant factor in fuelling his own burgeoning nationalism, especially after 1885 when radicalism begins to fracture. It is at this juncture, disillusioned by the way that radical energies were increasingly diverted into single issue campaigns, that Cowen's politics became overtly imperialist. Finally, the commercial advantages of promoting an imperial foreign policy cannot be dismissed out of hand. Cowen was an extremely shrewd businessman who never allowed sentiment to colour or influence his financial judgement. Prosperity - personal, regional and national- had to be accorded the highest priority, as this statement to the

electorate in 1885 shows:

Our imperial supremacy has secured us mercantile supremacy. If one leaves us the other will follow; and if our trade is destroyed the whole fabric of our prosperity will go by the run.... We have the Empire, we must hold it, and to do so we must be prepared to defend its interests in Council and fight for them in the field or in the ocean.⁵

In the mid-1850's the possibility of Cowen advocating an imperialist policy could scarcely have been more remote. Cowen's Foreign Affairs Committee⁶ was uncompromising in its expression of support for all oppressed nations and, unlike similar committees established in Sheffield, Birmingham and elsewhere, the influence of David Urquhart was minimal.⁷ The Republican Brotherhood, which rapidly evolved as the committee's 'advance guard', adopted the slogan "the government of the people, by, and for, the people" and campaigned explicitly for the establishment of a "democratic and universal" republic.⁸ Russia was a constant target of Cowen's vituperative denunciation of European despotism, while his personal involvement in the attempted assassination of the French Emperor, Louis Napoleon,⁹ must rule out any lingering suspicion that his commitment to republican principles was less than sincere. In fact, Cowen's republican reputation provided the Conservative and Whig opposition with valuable ammunition in their bid to prevent his election in 1873. Broadsheets, with telling extracts from THE NORTHERN TRIBUNE, accused Cowen of making a "rabid and seditious attack upon the British monarchy" but he cleverly sidestepped the issue by claiming that Republicanism was simply "political speculation". With consummate political skill - and breathtaking hypocrisy - he assured the gathered crowds that he "had never been so absurd or so tenacious of his opinions as to be intractable in matters of detail".¹⁰ The quiescence of foreign affairs at that time allowed his disclaimer to stand

unchallenged but the pages of THE NORTHERN TRIBUNE, financed by Cowen and under his editorial control, prove otherwise. Although the Republican Brotherhood espoused indoctrination as the optimum means of establishing an English republican government, the use of force was not ruled out, as a last resort, to free oppressed European nationalities:

...If Kings and Cossacks will not, or can not, understand reason - the intellectual weapon of intelligent men - is it our fault that it only remains for us to argue with 'stupid guns'? If so, give up liberty! Renounce the hope of freedom! for once proclaim that you will not defend yourselves nor - O' Cowards! your brethren, from the brutality of tyrants, and the wild beasts of every Royal jungle will be let loose upon you.¹¹

Republicanism, as far as Cowen and the local radical movement was concerned, was not a short-lived response to either the European nationalist struggles or the American Civil War. The unusual longevity of the Newcastle Foreign Affairs Committee, and the proliferation of Republican Clubs which attracted a large number of adherents into the early 1870's, confirms that constitutional change was a significant component of the radical agenda.¹² Republican luminaries such as Charles Bradlaugh, George Odger and Holyoake all visited the region and were warmly received, especially among the mining communities. Newcastle also found itself the focus of a good deal of official scrutiny following Charles Dilke's unprecedented attack upon the profligacy of the monarchy at a meeting of the city's Republican Club. Chaired by Cowen, it was reputedly his introductory remarks that galvanised Dilke into making comments that, with hindsight, he realised were extremely imprudent.¹³ The speech caused a furore and considerable embarrassment to Gladstone, given that Cowen's father had so recently been awarded a knighthood for his services to the River Tyne Commission. But even the resurrected popularity of the monarchy, prompted by the Prince of Wales's recovery from typhoid in early 1872, did

little to stem the tide of republican fervour that gripped the locality. Although republicanism has been regarded as a declining, if not moribund, force by 1872,¹⁴ Tyneside branches continued to proliferate and large open-air meetings remained a prominent feature of local politics for at least another twelve months.¹⁵

Cowen's reputation as a republican was further reinforced by his first major speech in Parliament in 1876. The Royal Titles Bill, by which Queen Victoria was to assume the additional title, 'Empress of India', had aroused strong feelings on both sides of the House.¹⁶ Deliberately flouting parliamentary procedure by intervening after both political leaders had delivered their concluding remarks, Cowen made a passionate plea for the Bill to be decisively rejected. Pouring scorn upon Disraeli's "frivolous" speech, he argued that the principal objection lay in the use of the word 'Empress' which, with its despotic, imperialist connotations, posed a serious threat to constitutional liberty:

In changing the name, I fear they may change the character of Government...we cannot be too jealous of regal and despotic encroachments upon popular power and influence...they would be taking the first step, but a substantial step, towards abolishing the time-honoured and historic title of Queen of England, and supplanting it by the tawdry, commonplace and vulgar designation of Empress.if there is any attempt to establish a species of socialistic empire, to drag into our constitution the forms and principles of Imperialism, the honourable gentlemen opposite would soon find that the superstition of Royalty has no real hold on the people of this land. 17

Cowen's intervention is said to have "electrified" the House¹⁸ and established his reputation as a powerful orator. An enthusiastic national and provincial press warmly acclaimed his "incisive logic",¹⁹ and copies of the speech were widely circulated at the numerous protest meetings which supported his anti-

imperialist stance.²⁰ The title was duly conferred but with the conciliatory proviso that it would not be used in the United Kingdom. At the time, Disraeli claimed to be disturbed by the growing crises in the Eastern provinces and therefore advocated the new imperial title as an essentially tactical manoeuvre; a warning shot - aimed at deterring Russia from any further expansionist encroachments.²¹ Intriguingly enough, the Eastern Crisis which had provided a golden opportunity for Cowen to air his anti-imperialism became, little more than a year later, the context in which his political credibility was first seriously questioned.

Cowen's failure to support the official Liberal policy (and, in effect, Gladstone's bid to re-establish himself as Leader) has already been rehearsed at length in Chapter 5. The question at issue here rests on whether Cowen's speeches on the Eastern Question are legitimately to be judged 'imperialist' as his opponents claimed. Alternatively, it might be argued that, at this point in time, he was simply maintaining his customary anti-Russian stance. The Bulgarian Atrocities agitation is commonly regarded as the 'baptism of fire of Liberal Imperialism'.²² Large pacifist demonstrations opposed to the government's foreign policy began, in the closing months of 1877, to be vigorously challenged by rival meetings assuming an aggressively nationalist stance. Meetings of 'the war-party' were distinguished by a good deal of rowdy flag-waving, and singing of 'patriotic' songs, particularly "Rule Britannia" and the music hall favourite "We don't want to fight, but by jingo if we do,". Opponents subsequently dubbed the riotous meetings 'jingo' and a new word found its way into the nation's vocabulary.²³ Nationalist sentiment was powerfully reinforced by the proliferation of special shows and exhibitions which aimed to recreate the principal events of the conflict. For instance, The Russo-Turkish War Exhibition provided a vivid and exciting

exposition of the campaign, reportedly attracting an enthusiastic audience of more than 100,000 visitors in London before touring the provinces.²⁴ Permission to use the Town Hall as the exhibition venue in Newcastle would have lent an air of official sanction and, accordingly, impressed those who flocked to view its much publicised 'novel effects'. Moreover, the simultaneous showing of a 'Great Military Spectacle' at Cowen's Tyne Theatre which dramatically recreated the Russian defeat at the Battle of Plevna has all the hallmarks of an orchestrated campaign, aimed at resurrecting older animosities: namely anti-Czarism, which had always been a significant feature of local radicalism.²⁵

At the beginning of the crisis, Cowen generously endorsed Gladstone's proposal for Bulgarian independence. It was not until April 1877, when Russia declared war against Turkey, that Cowen began to assume the pro-government position of opposing Czarist expansion and thus became estranged, not just from most of his Liberal colleagues, but also from a large portion of the working class electorate. In the early months of 1878, influential sections of the working classes all publicly declared themselves in favour of 'neutrality'. Freethinkers, led by Charles Bradlaugh, vociferously condemned the religious bigotry which they maintained had caused the conflict and adopted a strictly neutral, pacifist line;²⁶ close links between republican and secularist groups would have been an important factor here²⁷ and local branches of the National Secular Society, at Bedlington and Seghill, formally upheld the official policy.²⁸ The Northumberland miner's, who had for so long been the backbone of Cowen's political power base, added their voice to the neutrality lobby and petitioned parliament "to preserve the greatest of British interests - peace"²⁹ Thomas Burt's influence was obviously significant, and he was an active supporter of Gladstone throughout the crisis. That being said, it is

also clear that the miners' determined opposition to war reflected other, more pressing preoccupations. A prolonged and bitter strike, and the generally depressed nature of the coal trade, had found some 8,000 miners 'locked out' in January 1878 and heavily reliant upon the financial support of fellow trade unionists and cooperative bodies.³⁰ Other working class groups were no less vulnerable to the difficulties produced by the slump in trade. The North of England Iron Trade, for instance, had reluctantly agreed a 10% decrease, reducing wages to a lower level than that reached during the 1867 depression.³¹ As the war party and the peace party collided, 1,200 pints of soup were being distributed to the unemployed in Newcastle every day.³² In the circumstances, it is hardly surprising that the Newcastle and District Trades Council should insist upon "strict neutrality".³³ Agricultural workers, too, were bound to find the economic arguments persuasive - especially when they were eloquently delivered by Joseph Arch, the influential leader of the N.A.L.U. In a speech to the Exeter labourers, which was given extensive coverage in the Chronicle, Arch reminded them that they had gained nothing from the Crimean War. "If the country has money to spare", he declared, "it should be spent in resuscitating the trade".³⁴ Meanwhile, at the Weekly Chronicle, W.E. Adams continually asserted that there was little working class support for the war party; agitators who had disrupted public meetings were denounced as unrepresentative - as workers from the Greenwich Arsenal "given leave of absence to attend".³⁵ Writing under the pseudonym, 'Robin Goodfellow', Adams pressed home his own pacifist views in home-spun, but effective, poetic style:

Watch, brothers, watch, the war-dogs are growling,
The great make war, the poor have to fight.
Let your watchword be peace; trade is declining
As the demons on swift pinions fly.
While the rich and the great in ease are reclining
'Tis we that suffer, struggle and die.³⁶

Inevitably, tensions in the economy were a key factor on both sides of the argument and, as the Chronicle's London Correspondent observed, wartime expenditure could have a positive impact upon certain trades:

No inconsiderable amount of the money recently voted by Parliament would be expended at the shipyards and ironworks at Jarrow and other places on the Tyne...at Jarrow especially the feeling of expectation was very high, and hopes were entertained that an influx of orders would lead to a revival of trade, which for a long time past has been in a very quiet state there.³⁷

All things considered, the economic situation seems to have loomed large in the working class consciousness, especially as a large slice of the workforce were engaged in the armaments and shipbuilding industries. However, with the threat of unemployment weighing so heavily upon the majority, they were rather less likely to be moved by Cowen's plea that they should remember Russia's harsh treatment of the Hungarians and the Poles. With the Quakers in the vanguard, the Non-conformists spearheaded much of the peace campaign. Cowen's conspicuous support for Beaconsfieldism cost him a number of friends and placed considerable strain on his relationship with other Radical colleagues such as P.A.Taylor, Holyoake, Auberon Herbert and Bradlaugh. On Tyneside, where the Liberal Association was tightly controlled by the prominent Quaker, Robert Spence Watson, the peace lobby was particularly effective, not just in marginalising the anti-Czarist faction but in persuading the working class electorate to endorse Gladstone's aggressive challenge to Hartington's leadership. In the wake of the 1874 debacle, the Liberals had taken deliberate steps towards establishing a more effective and efficient organisational structure. Watson's Caucus-building strategies during Cowen's prolonged illness gave the Tyneside Liberals a singular advantage and, although some

dissenting voices were prepared to applaud his independent stance, on this issue he was noticeably isolated. The admiration of the Newcastle Conservative Association³⁸ was small compensation for the torrent of censorious mail which spurred him to defend his actions. "I never set up for a political prophet", he insisted, in his regular 'London Letter' and, warning against Russia's secret plan to partition the Ottoman Empire, he stressed that his views were not "loose comment" but based on a "meticulous analysis of the facts".³⁹ Given that only a handful of supportive letters were printed in the Cowen Press during the crisis (and those signed 'A Radical' or 'An Englishman' may not have been authentic) it can be assumed that, apart from the Foreign Affairs Committee, anti-Russian feeling was something of a spent force in the region. For Cowen, though, the Eastern crisis had resurrected once more the spectre of Russian expansion and it was this which dictated his enthusiasm for Beaconsfield's foreign policy. In the process his innate nationalism was greatly animated but, for all his intemperate speeches, there are no indications that he had begun to embrace the more aggressive imperialism that coloured his politics later in his career.

The ideological chasm between Cowen's Russophobia and the predominantly pacifist stance of the Tyneside people can best be appreciated by drawing some pertinent comparisons. Russophobia is considered to be fairly insignificant by the 1870's, apart from the London-based activities of Maltman Barry and the Magna Charta Association⁴⁰. Like Newcastle, Sheffield had exhibited strong Russophobic sentiments in 1854 but, interestingly enough, the evidence suggests that these resurrected antipathies became the primary factor in mobilising an effective counter-attack upon Gladstone's peace campaign. From the start of the crisis in 1876 A.J.Mundella had acted as Gladstone's unofficial adviser, taking careful soundings of public opinion and arranging

sympathetic newspaper coverage on his behalf.⁴¹ In effect, Mundella's political dexterity enabled Gladstone to continue to wield power behind the scenes. Although his activities attracted heavy criticism from some quarters, Mundella was unrepentant. He freely accepted responsibility for "stirring up our Chief to this insubordinate act...he has certainly taken my opinion of the state of the House and the country", and remained committed to assisting Gladstone by all the means at his disposal,"..it strengthens my manhood to be brought together with him".⁴² Until the latter months of 1877 Mundella's meticulously coordinated campaign was extremely successful, and Gladstone's leadership, albeit unofficial, was increasingly welcomed. A disastrous public meeting in Sheffield at the end of December, however, proved to be a singular embarrassment. As Mundella admitted, "The Tories are wild with joy in this House and, of course, I am silenced".⁴³ Valiant efforts to retrieve the situation availed little and a further mass meeting held at the end of January was reported to be "uproarious throughout".⁴⁴ The resolution advocating peace was subsequently rejected by an overwhelming majority. Mundella ascribed the defeat to the presence of a "large anti-Russian feeling in Sheffield",⁴⁵ and not to any concerted attack upon Gladstone which is thought to have inspired pro-government meetings elsewhere.⁴⁶ Needless to say, Cowen's Commons speech in defence of government policy was roundly condemned by Mundella but, much to his surprise, when he told Cowen what he thought of him, "he took it well, expressed great respect for me and told me that the Tories had resolved on making a dead set against me at Sheffield".⁴⁷ According to Mundella, Cowen invited him to contest the Newcastle seat in his stead, begging him to "seriously think it over". The Newcastle Liberal Association, meanwhile, had already recognised the need to find a suitable colleague for Cowen who could restore harmony to their seriously disunited party.⁴⁸

The Russophobia that lay at the heart of the war agitation in Sheffield appears to have been conspicuously absent in Wolverhampton. Equally, the opposition do not seem to have been motivated by that personal animus which became so marked a feature of the London meetings.⁴⁹ Marching past the Reform Club and hurling loud abuse at Gladstone had assumed something of a ritual in the capital, so much so that the police were obliged to form barricades to protect his house.⁵⁰ In Wolverhampton, the alignment of working class radicalism and local Liberalism so successfully engineered in both Newcastle and Sheffield, proved altogether more elusive.⁵¹ Potential supporters were reputedly "violently anti-party"⁵². Close proximity to Birmingham(so notable for its model Caucus), and the existence of a certain amount of traditional rivalry, seems to have produced an extreme reaction. With the Tories careful embellishment of their public image, which cast themselves as the party best able to serve the interests of the nation as a whole and not merely those of a particular political group, the ideological climate could scarcely have been more conducive to the bellicose nationalism that swept Britain during the crisis. Wolverhampton thus became closely associated with the massive jingo meetings of the period, forcefully articulating "working class indifference to the claims of party."⁵⁴

Traditionally, patriotism and radicalism had been synonymous terms;"The patriot was the radical".⁵⁵ By the time the Eastern Question had finally been resolved, this was no longer an absolute and the suggestion is that the Conservatives appropriated the patriotic high ground for themselves by presenting the people with a stark choice: to support the Liberal/Radical policy of strict neutrality and the cause of international peace, or to endorse Conservative foreign policy which unequivocally prioritized in favour of the national interests of the British people. There can be little doubt

that the Eastern Crisis provided the context in which this ideological shift took place. However, context is not the same as causation and there are good grounds for regarding Conservative tactics as being opportunistic rather than catalytic.⁵⁶ There had always been a fine tension between the Liberals' commitment to Cobdenite internationalism and that powerful strand of nationalism which remained inherent in the patriotism espoused by the party's radical wing. The Liberals' preoccupation with organisation and discipline after 1874 was interpreted by many as the surrender of patriotism in favour of party, and it was this change, more than any other, which enabled the Conservatives to seize the initiative and assume the patriotic mantle. This was certainly the case in Wolverhampton. And, it was also the nub of the argument put forward by Cowen in the Commons in February 1878, when he reminded the House of a time "When none was for party, And all were for State".⁵⁷ According to Cowen, "patriotism and good sense" required them to put aside party considerations at times of national crisis and "remember only that we are Englishmen, and present a united front to the world".⁵⁸

While Cowen had no qualms about supporting the foreign policy of the opposition, and was more than prepared to suffer the consequent damage to his own political career, his opinion of Conservatism remained fundamentally unchanged: "A Tory", he said, "was the embodiment of all that was objectionable in a citizen".⁵⁹ Holyoake once suggested that if Cowen transferred his allegiance to the Conservatives he might achieve high office:

Disraeli is dead. Do you not see that you may take his place if you will? It is open. His party has no successor among them. He had race, religion and want of fortune against him. You have neither of these against you. You are rich, and you can speak as Disraeli never could. He had neither the tone nor the fire of conscience. You have the ear of the House and the personal confidence of the country, as he never had. In his place you would fill the ear of the world.⁶⁰

Holyoake's confidence in Cowen's prospects as a prominent Conservative was not misfounded. The Conservative party circulated Cowen's speech on foreign policy in order to "retard the triumph of Liberal principles in the east of Europe" and it was widely hailed as an "exposition of a truly patriotic policy".⁶¹ With his polemic speeches being used as Tory propaganda it is hardly surprising that some of his friends and supporters should assume that a switch of allegiance was a mere formality. Cowen had no such confusion. "There is one difficulty", he told Holyoake, "I am not a Tory".⁶² For Cowen, patriotism was not the ideological property of one party or the other. The Patriotic Association which was established in the aftermath of the eastern crisis promoted a similar view in its circular address:

It will not interfere with internal questions, nor with elections except when some important issue of foreign policy is at stake. In such cases, its influence will be thrown in to support the candidate who distinctly undertakes to defend the honour and interests of England abroad. Among its promoters are Liberals who will not abandon the right to be patriots to a single party in the state, and who look with disgust upon the narrow and offensive party spirit and un-English wire-pulling of the Birmingham school.⁶³

Patriotism, of course, had different shades of meaning for different people, as Cunningham rightly recognises⁶⁴. The fact that Conservatism became closely identified with patriotism at the end of the century did not preclude its continued usage by radicals who still regarded it as an essential weapon in the battle against despotic and tyrannical power. The Caucus was thus vigorously attacked by Cowen as being anti-democratic. "It substitutes, he said, "fugitiveness for patriotism".⁶⁵ Attempts to gag opponents of the Liberals' Coercion Bill in 1882 were interpreted as an attack upon the inalienable right of free speech and, as such, were denounced as being

unpatriotic. The appended verse, 'The Cloture: A Patriotic Song', illustrates the way radicals persistently articulated their opposition to encroachments on popular liberty by employing traditional patriotic terminology and frames of reference:

Gladstone! cease thy wiles.
Gag not the honest band
Of England's patriot sons,
Proud of their Fatherland.
.....
Our Councils must be free,
No cloture stain our laws
But Magna Charta liberty
Sustain Old England's cause.⁶⁶

And, by the same token, the panoply of propaganda aimed at generating working class patriotic fervour did not always have the desired or expected effect.⁶⁷ In the case of the Volunteer Force, recreation rather than ideology was being more effectively modified. The sheer cost of expensive uniforms and regalia poses more serious questions about whether the working classes were all represented within the ranks. How many Tyneside workers could afford £3.00 in 1859?⁶⁸ As for patriotism, the Truro Rifle Volunteers collectively refused to sign up for active foreign service during the Eastern crisis, and the War Office, fearing mass defections, prohibited all resignations for the duration.⁶⁹ "Patriotic obstruction", claimed Cowen, "is the protest of the minority against the arrogance of office and the intolerance of power", in a bid to legitimize his unpopular attack upon the Liberals' Irish policy⁷⁰. From the late 1870's when foreign affairs may be said to have dominated British politics, patriotism was increasingly understood as an absolute requirement to defend the national interest from any external threat, but it did not supplant the traditional radical interpretation which upheld its interrelationship with

the primacy of Anglo-saxon liberty. Both strands of patriotic thought could, and did, happily coexist. For instance, the attempt to field an independent working class candidate, Elijah Copland, in defiance of the express wishes of the Newcastle Liberal Association, was still being stoutly defended in patriotic language in 1883:

He did not think the working men of Newcastle were any less patriotic than the working men of Morpeth; and they could as easily find the money in this constituency as they could fourteen miles north...Let the working men select a working man who, if elected, would be a sound Radical in politics and a man who would not give his vote merely for the party, but for the state.⁷¹

Cowen's patriotism was never challenged, even though some commentators regarded it as "occasionally wrong-headed".⁷² Implicit in that radical patriotism was a deeply held regard for, and pride in, Anglo-Saxon cultural roots. Cowen was, if nothing else, a man of letters who read widely and was fully conversant with the idea of progress that permeated European political and social discourse for the greater part of the nineteenth century. This would have included a thorough understanding of Darwin's evolutionary theory which identified the advanced state of development of western European nations and, most importantly, the superiority of the Anglo-saxon race.⁷³ The origins of a racist ideology stressing the primacy of Anglo-Saxon culture has been traced back to the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries, and recently claims have been made that an imperialist English culture was detectable as early as the twelfth. The tendency then was to present a sharp dichotomy between christian civilisation and the barbarity and savagery of non-christian culture.⁷⁴ The similarity between this polarised view of the world and that which held sway in the late nineteenth century is self evident. In 1878, "The duty of every Englishman", according to the Church of England Missions, was

"to civilize and christianize Africa"⁷⁵

The rise of the science of Anthropometry during the 1860s and 1870s brought authoritative weight to bear on those racist notions which coalesced into Social Darwinism⁷⁶, and strengthened the growing consensus that Britain had a mission to "spread freedom and justice to other, more backward parts of the world"⁷⁷. Studies such as The Races of Man by Robert Knox (1859) used detailed anatomical illustrations to demonstrate the existence of identifiable developmental strengths and weaknesses in the human race. Anthropometric data was subsequently pillaged by nineteenth century cartoonists who sought to caricature the Irish as ignorant and backward by endowing them with apelike features, particularly in the wake of the Fenian outrages. The Irish were an obvious target. The need to eradicate the unrest and rebellion emanating from Irish shores assumed symbolic proportions as, more than any other troublesome territorial possession, Ireland came to be regarded as "a⁷⁸ test case of informed imperialism and a key instance of its offensive results". The Irish question had long been a thorn in the side of successive governments; a source of acute embarrassment to those who professed to hold libertarian principles unless it could be proven beyond all doubt that the Irish were innately incapable of governing themselves. Even John Stuart Mill, the renowned author of On Liberty (1859), became an active proponent of that school of thought which regarded the Irish as unfit to govern themselves.⁷⁹ Mill's views were doubtless the product of his years spent with the East India Company and, in essence, his main argument against extending democracy to Ireland was the profound conviction, outlined in his book England and Ireland (1868), that there were detectable similarities between the Hindu and the Irish people; both were held to be "unfit for more than a limited and qualified freedom".⁸⁰ Charles Dilke's Greater Britain, which was also published in 1868,

employed the same kind of imperialist apologetics; the British were a superior race and, according to Mill, uniquely endowed "with an incomparable understanding of liberty".⁸¹

The concern here is to establish exactly where Cowen stood in relation to the currency of these ideas. Clearly, he did not subscribe to Mill's extremely low opinion of the Irish race. His indomitable efforts to defend their right to radical reform demonstrates that he fully endorsed their claim to be capable of self-government. Moreover, in doing so, he fostered rigorous public scrutiny of the conspicuous inadequacies of British rule. Nevertheless, if Cowen's speeches are carefully scrutinized it is plain that he was not immune to the insidious workings of racist propaganda, not even as it related to the Irish. Preaching the unpopular doctrine of Home Rule at a meeting in Newcastle he fervently upheld the Irish cause and yet the language he used to do so reveals a certain amount of concurrence with the idea that the Celts were an inferior race:

It is difficult for a rigid, methodical, Puritanic Englishman with all his push and thrift and tact to appreciate the bright, quick witted, imaginative and emotional Roman Catholic Celt with his slovenliness, and irregularity, his strange mixture of acuteness and simplicity.⁸²

Cowen closely identified himself with those commentators who differentiated between colonies which were peopled by members of the 'Anglo-Saxon family' and other territorial possessions, mainly located in the sub-tropics. His private library contained a number of books and papers related to the British imperial territories⁸³, and his speeches are eloquent testimony to his tacit agreement with many, if not all, the sentiments expressed therein. In 1877, Thomas Brassey M.P. produced a pamphlet which highlighted Britain's "proud position as the mother-country of the great

Anglo-saxon brotherhood" and looked forward to a future when they would all be partners in a great federation.⁸⁴ Such sentiments were echoed by Cowen in a speech in 1885 on the dependencies. "Nationality", he said, "is the soul which animates and exalts the whole brotherhood of associated men. This sentiment should be, and is, the link of life between England and her colonies".⁸⁵ He shared Brassey's dream of a federation which hinged upon the confident expectation that, at times of national crisis, the imperial colonies would provide Britain with an insuperable fighting force. Furthermore, this same speech reveals beyond all doubt the extent to which he had absorbed Darwinian theory:

No inferior race ever displaced a superior one, except when the superior one had first become demoralised. Inferior races have swept over the lands as scavengers - clearing the way for better tenants. They have never held what they won. The ultimate victory⁸⁶ has always been for the fittest and it will be so with England.

Even though he was a fierce opponent of Liberal policy whereby Britain had assumed the protectorate of Egypt he contended that "semi-civilized" people would always be defeated in a conflict with a superior power:

The marvel is that men versed in affairs should have ever dreamed, when once we went there, overthrew the government and destroyed its defences, that we could leave as easily as a crowd leaves a public meeting. ... From the character of the two races, retention and advance on our part are inevitable. It is our destiny and theirs. We can no more escape from it than a man can escape from his shadow. Civilization marches at the rear of conquest. This experience is as universal and unvarying as cause and effect.⁸⁷

It was a theme to which he constantly returned, most notably in his last public speech delivered at the Diamond Jubilee celebrations in Newcastle, when he affirmed his belief in the law of human progress: "As Mr. Spencer has shown, we can no more elude the laws of human development than we can elude the law

of gravitation".⁸⁸

Equally, his acceptance that Britains imperial territories were mainly populated by barbaric or semi-civilized races is explicitly stated in all his speeches on foreign policy. Britain, he believed, had a duty and responsibility to "turn its freedom to noble uses"⁸⁹ - to civilize "unoffending savages"⁹⁰. This belief in a moral civilizing mission was not wholly confined to those whose politics could be described as 'imperialist' but was an expression of faith common among most religious groups,⁹¹ especially Quakers who linked the issue with the long standing campaign against slavery. Quakers, such as Robert Spence Watson, appear to have had little difficulty in reconciling their commitment to the cause of peace with a belief in an 'imperial ideal'.⁹² In a letter to his daughter, Watson claimed that a mission to Africa would confer mutual benefits on both countries; Britain would gain commercially from the increase in trade and the African people would finally be free of the slave trade:

What is right is best, and what is good and pleasant for ourselves is good and pleasant for others...the missionaries are going first to prepare the way and then our merchants will soon follow...this will put down the slave trade.⁹³

Reluctant imperialists - those who had formerly deplored the train of aggressive and violent annexations - were gradually lured into believing that a British Empire would be the means of advancing the cause of civilization. Cowen's editor at the Weekly Chronicle, W.E.Adams, was among those who had consistently spoken out against the expansion of British territory and yet he later came to view the scramble for Africa in altogether more favourable light. The anti-slavery argument persuaded him that in British hands the Empire could be a force for good in the world and, in 1896, was utilized as an equally powerful

justification for his strident opposition to the Boers who were "born slave-holders".⁹⁴

Cowen's belief in Britain's civilizing mission was not an aberration, tacked on to justify his later imperialist beliefs. His election speeches in 1873-4 are full of statements which endorsed this view. He repeatedly referred to England's matchless commercial power and claimed that it was "generally wielded for the advantage of mankind"⁹⁵ And, even though he resolutely insisted that the spread of commerce and christianity should never be achieved by violent means there is no suggestion, in any of these early speeches, that he favoured relinquishing a single acre of those imperial territories. On the contrary, what comes through most strongly is his pride in Britain's superior commercial strength:

Indeed the commerce of this country is incalculable. Ordinary men can scarcely realize the figures when they hear them repeated. There is no nation of the world in ancient or modern times that ever approached it. We have almost the entire carrying trade of the earth at our command....I do not hesitate to predict that this country will become the commercial depot for the entire civilized world.⁹⁶

While the libertarian in him deplored the way large stretches of territory had been acquired he exonerated his own generation from all blame. The Empire, he maintained, could not be wilfully abandoned but Britain must fulfill her obligation to bring "the loftiest form of civilization" to the people of the world:

To abandon the opportunity of usefulness conferred, to throw aside the hope of securing equal rights and impartial freedom, to destroy the means of establishing a feeling of fraternity and consciousness of common, material interests amongst so many millions of our fellow beings, would be a narrow, a niggardly, a short-sighted, and a selfish policy for a great nation to pursue.⁹⁷

In 1880, Cowen may have lauded the commercial advantages of the Empire but he was still a long way from advocating war to buttress her possessions and her position as a world power. "Power", he insisted, "to the last particle of it, is duty".⁹⁸ By 1885, his earlier stress on the nobler purposes of Britain's vast Empire which made her more than "the mere workshop of the world" had been replaced by a more aggressive - and less heroic - materialism. Objections to the dissolution of the Empire were still located in the old arguments: civilization would be retarded and the territories would fall prey to the despotic and tyrannical rule of Russia. But the commercial interests were now much more forcefully expressed. National and international trade, and investments estimated as equivalent in value to the National Debt, would all be lost if the Empire was not stoutly defended. Cowen refused to accept that any Englishman could "accept such a sacrifice with equanimity, or any patriot contemplate such a catastrophe with composure".⁹⁹ National prosperity was a high priority, not least because Tyneside was an important shipping and commercial port. The interests of the region and, by the same token, his own personal finances must be regarded as a contributory factor in his determination to fight for Britain's share of world trade, by force of arms if necessary. It was a price he was more than willing to pay:

That price may often mean war, and it always means preparedness for war. A commercial community cannot accept peace at all hazards, because no commerce would be safe under a flag dishonoured and despised. ...I am for keeping what we have - by force of arms if requisite - I am not for aimless extension or factious meddling in the affairs of other nations.¹⁰⁰

The greatest obstacle to reconciling Cowen's subsequent imperialism is thought to be his high profile commitment to the cause of Home Rule. His unflagging efforts on behalf of the Irish nationalists do seem strangely

contradictory, especially when juxtaposed with his later determination to retain the Empire at all costs. A number of explanations suggest themselves here. Firstly, at the time when he was most actively pressing for Irish constitutional reform, in the early 1880s, he was also an outspoken opponent of the Liberals' imperial policy and consistently voted against the annexations in Egypt and the Sudan.¹⁰¹ He considered the accretion of more territory to be extremely unwise and greatly regretted that there were not enough independent Liberals to deter the majority "who follow the government blindly and without question"¹⁰² Even in 1885 when his views had hardened considerably he still denounced the "scramble for material prosperity":

The most dexterous special pleader, or the most belated panegyrist cannot reconcile this catalogue of annexations, occupations and protectorates with the ascetic programme promulgated by the Government four years ago.¹⁰³

There has also been a marked tendency to misunderstand precisely what Cowen was advocating when he championed Irish demands for Home Rule. He never, at any time, supported Irish independence. Even in 1874, when Irish votes were crucial to his election and he might have been tempted to prevaricate, his opposition to it is explicitly stated. While the principle of Home Rule had his wholehearted approval, he told the assembled electors that he "was not in favour of dismemberment of the British Empire, and I don't believe the supporters of Home Rule are either".¹⁰⁴ The introduction of Irish Home Rule, he consistently maintained, "means improved union, not separation"¹⁰⁵ When the Home Rule Bill was finally debated in the Commons in 1886, Cowen still reiterated his conviction that the unity of the Empire was not at issue. The Bill, he claimed, was a "decentralising not a disuniting" measure.¹⁰⁶

The seeming contradiction between conceding Home Rule to the Irish

and advocating an imperialist policy is then not nearly so incongruous as it might appear. A good case can be made for regarding Cowen 's involvement in the Irish nationalist cause as a key factor in fuelling his own insurgent nationalism. Cowen, it must be remembered, participated in the campaign at a unique level. Not even an Irishman, they claimed, could have pressed Irish demands more rigorously and, for his part, it was no secret that he admired their determination and patriotism.¹⁰⁷ Throughout his career he had enjoyed close contact with almost every important foreign nationalist, each one prepared to risk all in the pursuit of their goals. As Europeans their claims for national autonomy were automatically respected.¹⁰⁸ Those who impressed him most - Mazzini, Garibaldi, Kossuth and Worcell - were all men with strong patriotic beliefs and it would be strange if some of their nationalist fervour had not had a significant, and lasting, impact.

Cowen's imperialism was, then, an extremely complex amalgam of ideas. It was also, most crucially, a reaction to the failure of radicalism which had begun to fracture in the latter years of the century. For a man like Cowen, who had embraced and fostered a progressive radical philosophy with extremely ambitious aims, the distraction of the left by issues that he considered marginal was a source of profound regret and disillusionment. The days of the great reform agitations had been replaced by single issue campaigns that tended to divide rather than unite the people. The Tichborne agitation of the mid-1870's was despised as being symptomatic of the degeneracy and virtual redundancy of radicalism. Cowen could not comprehend how the public could be infatuated by such a "vulgar hero",¹⁰⁹ and he was frankly dismayed that working class energies, which should have been expended in fighting for more equitable representation, were being ploughed into such a dubious affair. As early as 1879, he was moved to admit that his own political enthusiasm had begun to

dissipate:

I have lost, it is true, much of my old political fervour. I say this with regret as an English Radical, but I am bound to acknowledge facts whether they make for me or against me. A good deal of the poetic enthusiasm that once characterized the aspirations of the English workmen have been dampened. There is now not a single Utopia which inspires his confidence or enlists his sympathies.... The English workman is pre-eminently practical, somewhat materialistic, and I fear I must add a little conservative.... he is to a large extent indifferent to anything that is not obvious and immediate, that is not pressing and present.¹¹⁰

The great social movements he had supported for much of his career appeared to have regressed and lost sight of their original ideals¹¹¹: Cooperatives had, he believed, become too narrowly focused on dividends and profits and accusations abounded of dishonest dealings, inequitable working practices and conditions. Intolerance, too, dogged the Temperance movement, causing him to sever all connection with its activities. Even electoral reform, which he had spent so much of his life fighting for, had fallen far short of the militant democracy he had envisaged. By 1885 he concluded that the radicalism he had espoused for so long "which once was a voice, is now only an echo".¹¹²

In the event, Cowen did not repudiate his patriotic radicalism for the all embracing imperialism espoused by Chamberlain.¹¹³ His ideological commitment to extend democracy was, if anything, pursued more vigorously than ever. In 1870 Cowen had given firm support to Bright's Bill to extend the franchise to women¹¹⁴ and had been invited to join the committee of the National Society for Women's Suffrage. When the issue was resurrected during the Third Reform Act campaign in 1884, Cowen willingly spoke in favour of Woodall's amendment, despite the prevailing opposition which scared off scores of other radicals such as Morley.¹¹⁵ For Cowen, the issue was perfectly

simple:

Justice and logic, precedence and experience, are in favour of her inclusion in the roll of citizenship. What is against it? Two potent forces - prejudice and pride. The prejudice engendered by organised selfishness of human nature, and the pride induced by ages of predominance. Nothing more. Woman, it is said, is inferior intellectually to man. What then? Do not the humblest and the feeblest, as well as the most gifted, enjoy the same civil rights?... If women wish to be politicians, let us remove all legal impediments.... We make for her a world of dolls and then complain that she is frivolous.¹¹⁶

Prejudice was not wholly restricted to the sphere of women's suffrage. The vexed question of independent labour representation attracted equally vociferous resistance.¹¹⁷ The Newcastle Liberal Association were vehemently opposed to any interference in the selection of parliamentary candidates. Speaking for the Caucus in 1883, Robert Spence Watson claimed that "a labour candidate would be a traitor in the Liberal camp... they would yet beat the Tory, and they would also beat the sham working man's candidate".¹¹⁸ Needless to say, Thomas Burt's refusal to support Elijah Copland aroused considerable ill-feeling. Contrasting Burt's "sheeplike" behaviour with Cowen's energetic support, the meeting agreed that he was "one of the best Radicals in England".¹¹⁹ Biagini claims that Cowen's support was part of a determined strategy to dismantle the Caucus and that Copland was pressed forward "in quite a sectarian spirit".¹²⁰ Cowen would not have quarrelled with that. His definition of patriotism required him to do just that. When Copland's defeat seemed inevitable, despite the vigorous backing of the Cowen press, the Irish made good their threat to vote for Gainsford Bruce (Tory).

The defeat fuelled rather than defused the campaign and 1885 found Cowen once again aligned with the labour representation lobby, backing Lloyd Jones against a local coal-owner, James Joycey. The Liberals and the Durham

Miners Association had reached an amicable agreement about the Chester-le-Street seat and Cowen's unwelcome interference caused a serious rift with the miners. Once again, Cowen's motives are perceived to be somewhat mixed. Aside from his desire to undermine the Caucus, Cowen is thought to have been prompted to exact some revenge for Joyce's financial support of a rival 'Liberal' newspaper.¹²¹ Biagini rejects Cowen's campaign as "the futile last battle of a romantic supporter of the old, 'direct' style of popular politics",¹²² stating that he was out of step with "the real needs of the working classes".

The breach with the miners, officially marked by his resignation as a Trustee of the DMA, and his dependence upon Tory votes to win the 1885 Election, certainly convinced Cowen that his radical vision was no longer viable. The decline of radicalism created a gaping ideological void. A brief flirtation with Hyndman's Democratic Federation was soon abandoned when it became more definitively socialist. This, he had argued, would make it "impervious to generous impulses".¹²³ In any event, Hyndman and many of his fellow socialists were also articulating the same defensive arguments about retaining the Empire.¹²⁴ The grand epic of British imperialism - success on a vast scale - offered a sense of purpose, a progressive vision of the future and a new challenge to Cowen at a time when he desperately needed a new outlet for his intellectual energies. "Great work", said Cowen in his last speech on the Empire, "requires great effort, and great effort is the essence of life".¹²⁵ When the door to political office finally slammed shut in 1886 where else but the international arena could he turn, to assuage his sense of failure?

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- 89.COWEN PAPERS B340 27.11.1885.
- 90 Ibid. B335 Election Speech 14.11.1885.
- 91.J.Saville op.cit. p165 civilizing the natives was regarded by the upper and middle classes as 'God's Will';also see J.F.C.Harrison LATE VICTORIAN BRITAIN 1875-1901,1991 p210.
- 92.P.Corder:THE LIFE OF ROBERT SPENCE WATSON,1914 p203.
- 93.ROBERT SPENCE WATSON PAPERS:undated letter Watson to his daughter Mabel
- 94.O.R.Ashton op.cit.p113, 170-1.
- 95.J.Cowen Spchs(1874 Election) op.cit.:2.1.1874 Cooperative Hall,Ncle.
- 96.Ibid.Spch. at the Town Hall 8.1.1874.
- 97.J.Cowen Spchs(Nr.East) op.cit:3.1.1880 'The Foreign Policy of England'
- 98.Ibid.
- 99.Ibid.18.11.1885 'British Empire,Federation & Foreign Affairs.
- 100.COWEN PAPERS B335 Election Speech 14.11.1885,Ncle.
- 101.COWEN PAPERS:various including Letter Cowen to Frank Carr 8.2.1884;Letter Cowen to William Mason 2.4.1884 all stating that the Government had made a grave error in annexing more territory.
- 102.COWEN PAPERS Letter Cowen to Josephine Butler 1.8.1882.
- 103.COWEN PAPERS B330 Spch. in Ncle.14.2.1885.
- 104.J.Cowen Spchs.(1874 Election)op.cit.,3.1.1874,Ncle.
- 105.COWEN PAPERS Spch.22.12.1883 at The Circus,Ncle.
- 106.COWEN PAPERS B378 7.6.1886 Spch.'Irish Home Rule'
- 107.see analysis in Chapter 5.
- 108.E.D.Steele op.cit.citing J.S.Mill's comment that the Hungarians had a measure of the qualities which made them capable of self government.p217.
- 109.Newcastle Weekly Chronicle:3.4.1875 London Letter.
- 110.COWEN PAPERS:B198 Spch. in House of Commons 2.4.1879 on Local Government Qualifications.
- 111.see Chapter 4.
- 112.COWEN PAPERS:B336 16.1.1885.
- 113.R.Quinault:'Joseph Chamberlain:A Reassessment' in T.R.Gourvish & A.O'Day (Eds) LATER VICTORIAN BRITAIN 1867-1900 (1988)pp83-88.
- 114.Newcastle Daily Chronicle 6.5.1870;Newcastle Daily Chronicle 5.4.1872, report of a meeting of the Womens Suffrage Society at which Lydia Becker praised Cowen's efforts;Newcastle Daily Chronicle 30.4.1872.,local petition for the Womens Disabilities Bill in 1872 raised 25,377 signatures;COWEN PAPERS:B116 Letter Emilie A.Venturi to Cowen 13.1.1872.
- 115.Newcastle Weekly Chronicle 14.6.1884; F.W.Hirst:LIFE & LETTERS OF JOHN MORLEY Vol11,1875-85 (1927)p255.
- 116.COWEN PAPERS B319 Speech to the House of Commons 12.6.1884.The clause was rejected 135:271 votes, with Gladstone,Pease and Morley all voting against.
- 117.E.Royle:RADICALS,SECULARISTS & REPUBLICANS Popular Freethought in Britain 1866-1915 (1980) p220.
- 118.Newcastle Daily Chronicle 15.2.1883.
- 119.Newcastle Daily Chronicle 13.2.1883.
- 120.E.F.Biagini:LIBERTY,RETRENCHMENT & REFORM (1992)p361.
- 121.N.Todd op.cit. p155.
- 122.Biagini op.cit.p367.
- 123.COWEN PAPERS B349 1885.

- 124.J.Saville op.cit. notes that Hyndman favoured reform but not independence and was "at heart an English chauvinist".The Fabians, too, issued no public policy statement about the Boer War.p174.
- 125.J.Cowen Spchs.(Nr.East) op.cit. 26.6.1897.

CHAPTER 7: CRITICAL PERSPECTIVES ON JOSEPH COWEN AND TYNESIDE RADICALISM

This thesis emanated from a conviction that despite the proliferation of extensive and wide-ranging studies of Liberal history, major gaps in our knowledge remain, particularly in the realm of regional politics. Earlier research tended to focus upon national issues, parliamentary reforms and Cabinet Ministers and, while the importance of such meticulous and painstaking analyses is indisputable, they have not significantly advanced our understanding of the roots of popular Liberalism. All the available evidence indicates that local issues loomed large in the consciousness of the electorate, especially in the period prior to the 1868 Reform Act. Even in the latter decades of the century, as the greatly enlarged voting public grew accustomed to a more sophisticated style of political campaigning such as that adopted by Gladstone, and the customary flurry of activity at election times was replaced by efficiently organised, permanent structures, local economic and social factors continued to exert considerable influence upon political postures and allegiances.¹ Clearly, the intricacies of parliamentary activity which have attracted so much scholarly attention need to be balanced by an equally rigorous scrutiny of the workings of local politics, and the relationship between the two more carefully evaluated.

Widespread acceptance that nineteenth century Liberalism had a specific geography serves to forcefully underscore the point.² Where certain regions and localities are shown to have exhibited unusually consistent and predictable political allegiances, an explanation may legitimately be sought at the grass roots. Despite the continuing emphasis upon the importance of Gladstone's charismatic leadership,³ neither personal popularity nor the allure of his definitive political philosophy can be held to wholly account for such consistency. More often than not, it was the local politician or activist who

assumed responsibility for fleshing out the proffered ideological parameters, and undertook the delicate task of precisely delineating the immediate relevance of individual measures. The popularity of the Liberals' retrenchment policy, for example, owed a great deal to the effectiveness with which it was interpreted in accordance with specific community interests. During the crucial 1874 elections, Biagini states that candidates "...took upon themselves the business of filling the gaps in the premier's manifesto and interpreting it so that it would look more attractive".⁴ On Tyneside, the Liberals' fiscal policy was deliberately cast in terms of providing "the free breakfast table" by increasing levies on the frivolous trappings of the wealthy - a concept which voters and non-voters alike might be expected to wholeheartedly endorse. And, of course, the economic advantages to be gained by the establishment of "an absolutely free port" were relentlessly pressed home.⁵ There is, then, a persuasive case to be made for assessing the importance of provincial politicians in harnessing and maintaining the popular vote.

The remarkable stability and resilience of the Liberal majority on Tyneside has been well documented in a succession of studies⁶ but while this achievement was in no small measure due to the dynastic dominance of the Cowen family, they have not been accorded the commensurate recognition. In the case of Sir Joseph Cowen the oversight is, perhaps, understandable. His career, though laudable enough in its own way, was not exceptional and his subsequent knighthood rewarded his efforts on behalf of the local community rather than acknowledged any major contribution in the sphere of national politics. However, in wresting control from the Whig clique in 1865⁷ and providing Tyneside with a Radical Liberal representative, the elder Cowen established a power base that his son, Joseph Cowen Jnr. was later able to capitalise upon.

The neglect of Joseph Cowen by generations of Liberal historians is an

altogether more serious omission. Cowen's political activities and parliamentary career placed him in the forefront of almost every noteworthy progressive movement, both at home and abroad, and on that basis alone his relegation to the faddist fringe is as inappropriate as it is misleading.⁸ The negotiated political compromise, by which Cowen agreed to represent the Liberals as a Radical candidate, ensured that Tyneside at least did not fall prey to the tide of reactionary feeling sweeping the country in 1873 and, more importantly, enabled the party leadership to regard the region as a solid bastion of Gladstonian Liberalism. The fact that Cowen was at odds with the Liberal Party for almost all of his parliamentary career, and actively opposed key areas of official policy, did not alter Tyneside's loyalist status at election time. Wholly unreliable as an accurate description of the prevailing political realities, the Liberal epithet nevertheless persisted, helped on by summary electoral statistics and the cooperation of generations of Liberal historians. Ultimately, Cowen's marginalisation has been so thorough that the ingrained traditional radicalism he inherited and sustained, and with which Tyneside was unquestionably associated at the time, has been effectively subsumed; subordinated to the rank of other contributory 'isms'(viz. Chartism, secularism, republicanism) which fed into but could not challenge the triumph of popular Liberalism.

Initially then, this thesis set out to explore the roots of popular Liberalism on Tyneside and analyse the importance of Cowen's intervention, as an important municipal politician, entrepreneur, newspaper proprietor and senior Liberal representative. As the work progressed, it quickly became apparent that the original criteria would have to be significantly modified. Radicalism, which according to received orthodoxy was assumed to be a bankrupt ideology by 1848,⁹ demonstrably continued to set the political agenda on

Tyneside, not just at mid-century but into the early 1880's. Several questions suggested themselves, all of which demanded a rigorous scrutiny of Cowen's own radical beliefs and the way in which they were given political expression, informally through pressure groups and other reforming organisations, and as they were articulated in the sphere of national politics. At the outset, Cowenite Radicalism had to be placed in the context of an existing well-rooted tradition. There was, quite clearly, a requirement to ascertain the extent to which Cowen could be held directly responsible for sustaining Tyneside radicalism and, aside from the question of personalities, there remained a need to consider the operation of other local factors upon the prevailing political ethos. The strength of local trade unionism, especially in mining and heavy engineering, was perceived to be of some significance here, as was the presence of an unusually large Irish population. In the final analysis, if local radicalism was to be redefined as a more resilient political force there was an obligation to determine whether this was an isolated phenomenon; some comparisons would have to be made with other Radical/ Liberal constituencies.

The decision to compare the Tyneside experience with that of Leicester, Sheffield and Birmingham was not arbitrary but based on the understanding that all three were important centres of urban radicalism. Birmingham, indeed, is commonly regarded as the gravitational centre of English radicalism. Equally, their respective political representatives, P.A.Taylor(Leicester), A.J.Mundella (Sheffield), and Joseph Chamberlain(Birmingham) offer markedly different perspectives on the workings of the Radical-Liberal alliance. Mundella, elected as the Reform League's candidate in 1868,¹⁰ rapidly distanced himself from the extreme left¹¹ and became established as a prominent supporter of Gladstone. Chamberlain's relationship with his premier, on the other hand, was manifestly adversarial. Invariably identified as the most outstanding spokesman

of Victorian Radicalism,¹² he was nevertheless perceived to be something of a political chameleon; architect of the National Liberal Federation and National Education League and yet an active proponent of progressive land reform. Unlike either Chamberlain or Mundella, P.A. Taylor¹³ was not embroiled in any high powered political manoeuvring but stood more firmly within the traditional radical mould. An avowed Ultra-radical, he was firmly committed to religious and electoral reform and actively involved in international and republican movements. On this basis, Taylor's career, which perhaps more closely represents that of the ordinary Radical member, was considered a useful barometer for judging the relative strengths and weaknesses of Cowenite Radicalism.

The existence of a strongly rooted regional radicalism during the eighteenth century must be given appropriate recognition if any sense is to be made of its later manifestation and progress. Political activities in and around Newcastle are well documented in numerous antiquarian studies and compose a fitting backdrop for the emergence of Thomas Spence's radical philosophy.¹⁴ As yet though, early Tyneside radicalism has not been subjected to any substantial scholarly analysis and, unfortunately, there has been a marked tendency to regard events such as the Town Moor Enclosure campaign as isolated phenomenon.¹⁵ This misapprehension was compounded by the fact that for many years Spence's contribution to the development of radical ideas was overshadowed by that of Thomas Paine, even though his critique of society was far more ambitious.¹⁶ A new biography of Thomas Spence has gone some way towards redressing the balance, persuasively arguing that the activities of local radicals - the self-styled 'Leather Aprons'- expressed a more mature, and coherent theory of oppression than that which could be ascribed to any short term, localised grievance.¹⁷ Ashraf's biography, and the seminal study of English Agrarianism produced by Malcolm Chase,¹⁸ have challenged the

fundamental misconception that Newcastle radicalism was ideologically inferior or indebted to the London based movement. The Newcastle Election Pledge(1774) was significant because the basic demands enshrined in the London formula were considerably augmented, encompassing both a predictable concern for community interests and an awareness of the need to tackle more comprehensive inequalities.¹⁹ The compelling argument put forward by Chase that Spence was the 'key figure' in English Agrarianism, drawing from and feeding into local radicalism, has inescapable implications.²⁰ If Spence is to be accorded greater significance, the continued stress upon the aberrant nature of local radical events and campaigns is no longer tenable.

Until recently, the general understanding of the nature of Tyneside Radicalism has been dominated by what might be termed the 'aberrant emphasis'. Interpretations of regional politics have been driven largely by the false perspectives of historians eager to explain the embarrassing failure and ignominious demise of national Chartism in 1848. Such explanations homed in on the perceived ideological weakness of the movement and complete lack of coherent organisation and leadership.²¹ This emphasis on failure may be said to have served both the left's anxiety to explain away the absence of a sustained class struggle and the right's desire to repudiate any claim that reform was driven from below. As a result, the enormous demonstrations mounted to protest against the Peterloo Massacre in 1819, and the high profile reform campaign of 1831-2 were glossed over, dismissed as a response to short term grievances by influential but essentially isolated minorities. The paucity of such analyses has since been exposed by a number of studies which have painstakingly and innovatively presented a compelling counter argument.²²

A new piece of research,²³ which has carefully reconstructed the activities of the Northern Political Union, indicates that the Newcastle

movement played a pivotal role in securing the successful passage of the Great Reform Act. Ridley's analysis questions Birmingham's primacy which was, he claims, little more than an exercise in self-promotion; a propaganda crusade generated by the B.P.U. leadership themselves and accepted by an indiscriminating press. In contrast, he cites the national importance of the N.P.U. campaign, the wider impact of their public statements and speeches, and the active participation of a large percentage of the working class population, especially local miners.²⁴ Ridley's bid to raise the status of local radicalism is substantiated by the available evidence which shows that many leading local Chartists were involved in radical events and campaigns in the earlier period (see Chapter 2.Fig.1). There were, in any case, strong links between the B.P.U. and the N.P.U., given that the leading men of both unions were brothers.²⁵ Charles Attwood, the founder and leader of the N.P.U., was reputedly far more radical than Thomas²⁶ whose political vision barely stretched beyond an obsessional belief in the need for currency reform and who was described by one biographer as 'a life long Tory'. It was Charles, not Thomas, who maintained his connection with radical politics, re-emerging in 1854 as President of the Newcastle upon Tyne Foreign Affairs Committee.²⁷

Acceptance that early Tyneside Radicalism was an essentially dynamic force at the cutting edge of radical politics, challenging the hegemony of London and Birmingham, directs us towards an alternative reading of local Chartism and fundamentally alters our understanding of political developments later in the century. The N.P.U. campaign provided local activists with a political apprenticeship that was to stand them in good stead when the fight for electoral reform was resurrected in 1838. The N.P.U.'s organisational framework had extended across the length and breadth of the region and key personnel were readily identified, many of them still being active in a number

of radical organisations, including the Union of Working Classes. The rapidity with which the N.P.U. was reorganised demonstrates both a clear faith in its ability to successfully press for reform and the respect that it could still command within the locality. The massive turnout at those early meetings, an estimated 70-80,000 in July 1838, can usefully be compared with the very low key activity in Leicester during the same period.²⁸ Close working relationships previously established with national activists and, of course, the ability to guarantee a substantial, enthusiastic gathering at demonstrations, also ensured the regular attendance of prominent speakers such as Harney and O'Connor. That being said, the pre-eminence of North East Chartism extends beyond any bald numerical estimate of its supporters or the notoriety of its leading lights. The absence of any significant economic distress refutes the suggestion that this was just a 'knife and fork' question for the unprecedented numbers of working people, especially miners and other trade unionists who participated.

The involvement of miners in Chartism has proved controversial, and there is no doubt that the case for 'minimal links' and the overriding importance of sectional interests has much to recommend it in general terms.²⁹ However, such arguments, and they are persuasive, simply cannot be made to fit the local movement. Even R. Church acknowledges that the coalminers of Northumberland and Durham were a special case, contributing to the leadership as well as providing a vital mass membership.³⁰ There were always bound to be some voices of dissent, given the large numbers involved, and citing individual cases of sectional opposition does not necessarily prove that a trade union consciousness was the primary impulse for the majority.³¹ The evidence meticulously collated by Colls and Wilson cannot be lightly dismissed either, especially as Church's criteria of experiential degradation and community

solidarity are both met. The claim advanced here, is that the support of entire mining communities was an important distinguishing characteristic of local radicalism, providing not just Chartist but other subsequent reform campaigns with an enviable display of solidarity and strength.

The revisionary critique presented by Gareth Stedman Jones in the early 1980s heralded a return to basics, a rigorous analysis of radical language itself as the optimum means of reconstructing Chartist ideology.³² The ensuing debate upheld the need for a greater emphasis on linguistics and moved the discussion on significantly by widening the terms of reference.³³ New studies of Chartism have since focused upon poetry and songs, as well as other symbolic devices such as banners and clothing, the suggestion being that they offer one of the more effective means of understanding its essential ethos.³⁴ The role of Methodism which many historians regard as ambiguous has been considerably clarified in the process. In Leicester, for instance, a positive link between radicalism and Methodism has been traced based on a careful scrutiny of the Leicester Chartists' Hymnbook compiled by Thomas Cooper.³⁵

On Tyneside, a study of radical speeches and songs, and the deployment of symbolic devices provided valuable insight into the complexity of radical ideology. The language and symbolism employed by local Chartists to press their claim was perceived to be singularly bold and confrontational, embodying those vital agrarian and international elements which were the motive force of eighteenth century radical ideology. The agrarianism that permeated local radicalism at all levels is extremely significant. It connects Chartism with its ideological roots and constitutes an uninterrupted line of continuity with Cowenite Radicalism. This, it is argued, ought to be the principal criterion upon which to positively establish its resilience. As Patrick Joyce notes, the vexed issue of land ownership was more than just "the politics of nostalgia".³⁶

The romantic yearning for some sort of golden age did not prevent radicals from formulating practical strategies to reclaim their 'natural rights'; it operated as a legitimizing force. One of the key strengths of the agrarian argument was the inherent belief that this was a battle that could be tackled, and won. The viability of obtaining the vote via the purchase of a forty shilling freehold persuaded numerous Tyneside Chartists to part with their hard earned, limited resources and invest in the Land Plan. The rather derisory assessment of O'Connor's Land Plan, which was thought to have contributed in no small measure to the failure of Chartism, has been re-evaluated. Most historians now recognise it as an important development in the progress of radical ideas, and as offering a realistic mechanism for the attainment of social and political freedom.³⁷ In addition, the presence of a large Irish population in the North East served to heighten local perceptions that land reform had to be placed at the top of any political agenda.

The Freehold Land Movement, which generated equal measures of criticism and support, unequivocally demonstrates that agrarian ideology was as strong as ever in 1848.³⁸ Chartism may have been ideologically bankrupt, in so far as it related to more immediate forms of oppression - the over zealous enactment of the Poor Law, for example - but radicalism was clearly alive and kicking. The radical tradition that Cowen inherited in 1847, when he first began to make an impact upon local politics was, as has been shown, already firmly established. His political vision then, and as it developed subsequently, derived its fundamental principles from his formative experiences, most particularly through his parents' involvement in the NPU and in other early reform campaigns. Cowen's importance lies more in the realms of tactics. He did not create a new radical agenda. The traditional goals aimed at reforming the land, the church and the electoral system were unchanged; he simply

promulgated a workable strategy for their achievement. The survival of radicalism, in a recognisable form and not just as the poor relation of the new Liberalism, was almost entirely due to his indomitable drive and political perspicacity; to his ability to harness existing radical energies into a more literate, cohesive force. There was no question of abandoning the fight for the Charter in 1848. On the contrary, local radicals were encouraged to press on for 'the Charter and something more'.

1848 was a major turning point. The widespread disillusionment that set in after Kennington Common, the loss of leadership, of funds, of meeting places and the diversion offered by mechanics' institutes, cooperatives and Temperance organisations, sloughed off the mass membership, leaving ever smaller numbers to maintain a skeletal Chartist presence in most towns. Even those regions where Chartism was perceived to be unusually tenacious and resolute seemed unable to protect themselves against the onslaught. As Kate Tiller has shown in a study of Halifax Chartism, the debilitated membership was in no shape to fight off the enervating effects of the economic upturn.³⁹ Nevertheless, a new study, Currents of Radicalism, has challenged existing interpretations by stressing the 'substantial continuity in popular radicalism', and highlighting the way that the events of 1848 prompted a renewal of cooperation between radicals across the social spectrum.⁴⁰ The primary focus, though, is firmly upon the Radical Liberal alliance. Notwithstanding the welcome acknowledgement that radicalism 'remained a major political force with a substantial impact upon both the Gladstonian Liberal party and on the Labour Party',⁴¹ there is no suggestion that this warranted anything more than a junior partnership; the Liberals retained absolute control. It can be argued, however, that relations between the two was not nearly so smooth and trouble-free as this appraisal implies. If pragmatism prevailed, it was not just the

'new model' radicals who were obliged to compromise. In some areas the greater compromise was exacted from the Liberals. The principal claim of this thesis is that the premium paid by the Tyneside Liberals amounted to a relinquishment of all but a semblance of control.

The accommodation reached with the Liberals did not, of course, turn upon negotiations conducted in 1873 when Cowen was persuaded to bid for the parliamentary seat. The bargaining strength of Cowenite Radicalism was built on much firmer foundations than the pre-election jitters of a nervous Government. It was forged in the doldrum days of the late 1840's when Cowen began to channel residual radical energies into various educational and international initiatives. Ideas of international brotherhood did not constitute a new dimension in local radicalism. Universality had always been regarded as an essential precept of the demand for natural justice. The vital difference was that Cowen encouraged the entire Tyneside community - and not just the supposed radical wing - to actively intervene in the political struggles of the Italians, the Poles and the Hungarians. The taint of elitism had to be avoided at all costs and, to that end, penny subscriptions proved to be an excellent strategy for ensuring maximum popular participation. Commitment had to extend beyond signing petitions and applauding sympathetic speeches. Apart from giving financial support they were invited to house, feed and employ refugees, even to enlist in a volunteer force and fight alongside Garibaldi. To say that this was a much needed distraction is to grossly underestimate its impact. In demanding a real commitment to those who "dare all honest things to achieve their freedom", Cowen ensured that the fight for liberty retained its former grip, and the struggle for domestic reform was not lost sight of.

Fascination for European nationalist struggles was not unique to Tyneside or the North East. Involvement, however, depended primarily upon the

intervention of individuals and their expertise in coordinating activity at regional or local level. The Tyneside people benefited most of all from Cowen's close friendship with prominent revolutionaries such as Mazzini, Garibaldi and Kossuth, not least because whenever they were his guests at Stella Hall local mechanics' institutes were assured of an eminent speaker for their debates. Cowen's republican activities brought him into close association with other notable activists including W.J.Linton, P.A.Taylor and George Dawson, a Birmingham Unitarian and prominent radical who was also editor of the Birmingham Daily Press.⁴² Linton and Taylor were the prime movers of the People's International League (1847-50) which became the parent association of a range of nationalist organisations in the 1850's. Although Leicester did not benefit from Taylor's influential radical connections until later, a nascent republican group was established in 1851 by John Sketchley, the long suffering secretary of the South Leicestershire Chartists.⁴³ Moreover, John Biggs (M.P. for Leicester 1855-62) was considered sufficiently sympathetic to the cause of European freedom to warrant Cowen approaching him for a subscription to the Mazzini Fund in 1859. Potential subscribers had to be trusted friends for, in effect, they were being asked to finance revolutionary activity. In return, they were promised absolute confidentiality.⁴⁴ Taylor's subsequent election in 1862 ensured the longevity of Leicester republicanism. Chamberlain and Mundella, on the other hand, are noticeably absent from the subscription and membership lists of nationalist movements. Chamberlain's republican activities seem to be a development of the early 1870's and, unlike Cowen or Taylor, there are no detectable links with prominent nationalists. According to Richard Jay⁴⁵, Chamberlain's republican fervour in 1871 was partly, if not wholly, a useful political bandwagon.

Not surprisingly, Newcastle was in the forefront of the republican

spirit which spawned countless Foreign Affairs Committees in the late 1850s. The F.A.C. in Newcastle was operational at least six months before any similar initiative could be coordinated at either Birmingham and Sheffield, while the vast majority of them were not formed until three or four years later.⁴⁶ Lack of information precludes any positive account of Leicester's involvement in the Foreign Affairs Committees and, in itself, this suggests that any activity must have been very low key.⁴⁷ Sketchley's working class republican group which has already been referred to may well have lacked the financial muscle to launch a Committee, despite a commitment to Linton's brand of republicanism. The greater proportion of the committees that were formed became, in the event, the child of David Urquhart and endorsed his narrow focus upon foreign diplomacy. By placing one of his own henchmen on the staff of the Sheffield Free Press Urquhart ensured that Isaac Ironside and his Committee remained "on the right track".⁴⁸ The extent to which Newcastle and Birmingham were able to distance themselves from Urquhart's influence almost certainly helped to buttress the continued independence of radical politics in both cities. For the Newcastle radicals, parliamentary reform was a vital component of the republican agenda and all attempts to sideline the question of universal suffrage was summarily squashed. As Mazzini's Republican Party manifesto decreed, the aim was to establish 'Liberty for all, association for all; a collective inspiration'.⁴⁹ The duality of the Newcastle Committee's objectives was to prove another of those 'political apprenticeships' which helped to direct and energize the local movement into a renewed reform campaign in 1858.

Collectivity was the key which Cowen believed would unlock the door of progress and all his energy and resources were expended in an effort to unite the entire community. The successful creation of a radical consensus as a result of his salutary influence over a plethora of working class organisations,

and doubly reinforced through the medium of innovative journalism, reached fruition in the formation of the Northern Reform Union in 1858. Nationally, the question of electoral reform generated little or no enthusiasm. In January, The Manchester Guardian could smugly observe that there was "no vehement craving among the mass of the population, for a privilege which they do not need, and are not yet fitted to exercise wisely".⁵⁰ Even so, The Guardian's leader writer was not averse to giving due recognition to Cowen's reforming efforts or to the "general character of the men of Newcastle". Another Manchester newspaper, The Weekly Times drew a sharp contrast between the N.R.U. activities and the "supineness of reformers near home".⁵¹ During the autumn Cowen undertook an arduous tour of the country in a bid to drum up some concerted national initiative, but he was dismayed to find widespread apathy even in such radical towns as Birmingham and Sheffield. Holyoake, writing in The Reasoner, did not mince his words but concluded that the prospect for reform looked bleak:

Politics in London is in a state of cretinism...and London is not alone. Manchester is Turnered and Pottered. Birmingham is only saved by Mr. Bright. What is Bradford doing? What is Liverpool good for? Leeds is dumb and impotent. In Rochdale alone Mr Cowen saw signs of national spirit worth counting.⁵²

Holyoake's faith in Mr. Bright was not entirely justified. By the following year, when Birmingham finally responded to the call for political action, Henry Cooper was bemoaning the growing chasm between the Reform Association and the Reform Club set up to represent the views of the working classes.⁵³ The non-electors, he claimed, were not prepared to settle for Bright's rate paying household suffrage proposal but were allegedly being

intimidated by their employers who controlled the Reform Association. The middle classes, he complained, "don't care 2d for the people's rights, neither they did in '32, but then they were afraid, now they think they have it their own way".⁵⁴ Cooper hoped to persuade Cowen to assist the Birmingham campaign so that "the tables might be turned", but by February 1859 he was obliged to concede defeat - "Birmingham is no more, you men of the North must wear the mantle."⁵⁵ North of the border, the reform movement was much stronger with Glasgow giving a lead to the other Scottish towns.⁵⁶ European nationalism had generated massive popular support in both Glasgow and Newcastle and it is no coincidence that they should lead the call for reform in 1858.

The importance of the NRU has invariably been overlooked, hastily dismissed as a short lived phenomenon which proved to be a 'dismal failure'.⁵⁷ However, it was this local campaign which rescued other radical towns and cities from political torpidity and forcibly brought the reform issue back into the public domain. The ensuing debate engaged people across the social spectrum, not just parliamentary notables. Even the London campaign relied upon the N.R.U. for advice and financial backing to mount a demonstration in Hyde Park in March, 1859.⁵⁸ As in 1832, Tyneside was in the vanguard of reform forcing the pace of change and, noticeably, no longer in the shadow of Birmingham. The confidence of Tyneside Radicalism, which contrasted so sharply with that which prevailed almost everywhere else, requires explanation. To a large extent, strong leadership must be cited as the most important factor. The disabilities which dogged other reform movements were not fundamentally different from those which had contributed to the failure of Chartism: class antagonisms, disunity, poor coordination of activities and weak leadership. Cowen's strategy was to tackle these issues systematically. He used his considerable wealth and influence to democratize mechanics' institutes and

empower the working classes. Cooperative societies were vigorously promoted, extending the experience of democracy and, once again, operating as an instrument of empowerment. This was a far cry from the patronage and control which elsewhere served the best interests of the Liberals and emasculated working class radicalism.⁵⁹ And, most of all, the easy crossover between membership of mechanics' institutes, cooperatives and trade unions already outlined in Chapter 3. greatly facilitated the spread of radical ideas and produced the solidarity necessary for translating aspiration into reality. In other areas, connections between such groups was often fiercely resisted. In Mansfield, for instance, cooperators were refused the use of a room in the local mechanics' institute on the grounds that mixing with 'such dangerous people' would threaten their hard earned respectability.⁶⁰

Neither Birmingham nor Sheffield displayed any real enthusiasm for the cooperative ideal during the 1860's - the crucial period when it was having such a major impact in the North East and, interestingly enough, in Leicester.⁶¹ As late as 1876, Mundella was still trying to generate some interest and expressing regret that Sheffield should be "ages behind some Lancashire towns I know on this matter".⁶² In Leicester, Owenite cooperative initiatives had found a number of adherents and, as Bill Lancaster suggests, the revival of interest signalled by the opening of a cooperative store in 1861 was both a testimony to that earlier tradition and an appropriate response from an industrial society dominated by small workshops.⁶³ The importance of local secularism provided the additional factor, uniting cooperators and secularists alike behind G.J.Holyoake's rationale.⁶⁴ Expansion into cooperative production, and the adoption of allotment schemes contrasts sharply with the negative version of cooperation which reputedly prevailed in Lancashire.⁶⁵ Leicester's involvement in the anti-vaccination movement has been explained as an emanation.

of the town's dissenting tradition but at best this offers only a partial explanation.⁶⁶ From January 1871, when The Cooperator circulated under the new title Anti Vaccinator, the cooperative movement spearheaded much of the campaign.⁶⁷ There are good reasons, then, for attributing the unusual degree of civil disobedience with the prevailing influence of prominent cooperators. This was clearly a factor on Tyneside, and in 1871 a number of leading cooperators including Thomas Burt M.P. were brought before the courts for failing to have their children vaccinated.⁶⁸

The political orientation of the local press played a major role in the formation of public opinion, particularly after the stamp duty was repealed, and often determined the precise nature of the Radical/Liberal alliance. The Sheffield Independent and the Birmingham Daily Post were both owned by Liberal activists.⁶⁹ Robert Leader, founder of the Sheffield Liberal Association and a close friend of Mundella, ensured that Gladstonian Liberalism was given the highest possible profile in the pages of the Independent.⁷⁰ Sheffield's most prominent Radical, H.J.Wilson, was no match for this assemblage of power and influence and, until his election as the member for Holmfirth in 1885, he was cleverly outmanoeuvred at every turn. Mundella was shrewd enough to recognise that connections with the radicals would have to be strengthened if the Liberals were to retain their hold on the constituency. Writing to Leader after the 1874 election, he stressed "the desirability of having Wilson and co.as friends instead of enemies".⁷¹ Hostile press coverage had soured relations with the radicals, and as Wilson's wife had come under particularly heavy fire for her involvement in the campaign to repeal the Contagious Diseases Act, Mundella was at pains to point out the necessity for greater restraint.⁷² In the event, Mundella placated Wilson with a "frank apology" from Leader and brought him into the fold as secretary of the Sheffield

Liberal Association.⁷³ In the pragmatism that followed the Liberals' disastrous showing at the polls, there was always a risk that the opposition would take advantage of any internecine wrangling and this must have contributed to Wilson's apparent willingness to make peace. Ultimately, Mundella managed the situation remarkably well and the tensions that remained rarely surfaced.

Chamberlain was equally fortunate. Under the proprietorship of J.T. Bunce the Birmingham Daily Post proved to be a powerful ally, backing Chamberlain's entree into Liberal politics and maintaining the same level of support when he made his dramatic exit to champion the Unionist cause.⁷⁴ In addition, Bunce was also directly involved in the establishment of the National Liberal Federation in 1875. The NLF which introduced a tightly organised party structure, mitigated against the traditional independent stance which Radical members had always prized. The 'broad span of Liberal opinion' which the NLF was designed to reflect, and officially promote, acted as a break upon the flow of progressive radical ideas and Chamberlain himself was obliged to adopt a more moderate pose and a less contentious programme of reform.⁷⁵

Although A. Little has concluded that the Leicester radicals had a constant 'struggle for access to the press',⁷⁶ a dissenting voice was supplied by the South Midlands Free Press after 1859. This acted as a counterbalance to the orthodoxy promulgated via the pages of the leading daily, The Leicester Mercury, owned by the vice president of the local Liberal Association⁷⁷. Thus the harmonious Liberal alliance that operated in Leicester from Taylor's election in 1862, appears to have been mirrored by the available local press.⁷⁸ While it might be argued that a more influential radical press might have challenged the prevailing equilibrium and strengthened the radical's position, there is no evidence that they were seriously disadvantaged either. Taylor, Mundella and Chamberlain were all to a lesser or greater degree

dependent upon the good offices of these newspaper proprietors to provide a platform for their policies and generate popular support at election time. In all three cities the press favoured the continuing hegemony of the Liberals in the political compromise that was reached, and this was generally the case elsewhere too.

The advantages which accrued to the Tyneside radicals from Cowen's ownership of The Chronicle newspapers must therefore be self-evident. As proprietor, Cowen not only reflected political opinion, he created it, offering generous publicity across the spectrum of radical interests. The activities of trade unions, cooperatives, friendly societies and mechanics' institutes were positively promoted as appropriate outlets for those who shared his radical view of the world. This view of the world encouraged the politicization of all working class organisations, and provided the means whereby campaigns and demonstrations could be meticulously coordinated and effectively managed. Local miners had particular reason to be grateful to Cowen who not only championed mining reforms but also backed Thomas Burt's candidacy in 1873. The unprecedented journalistic support given to local trade unionists, especially during the Nine Hours Campaign, paid incalculable dividends in terms of political cohesion.⁷⁹ This can usefully be compared with the 'Lib-Labism' of the Leicester trade unionists who are said to have abjured their former organic connection with radical politics in favour of sectional interests.⁸⁰ Equally, the success of arbitration and conciliation mechanisms so keenly promoted by the powerful Non-conformist lobby, and by Mundella who became so closely associated with it, helped to draw Sheffield trade unionists into partnership with mainstream Liberals and away from the militant activity so notable in 1866.⁸¹ Jonathan Spain's study of the 1875 labour law reforms⁸² has noted that the powerful and well organised trade unionists in the N.East

were far less dependent upon statutory legal protection. Although the issue was an important factor in the Liberal defeats of 1874, its impact locally was minimal. Cowen's success at the polls should not be equated with the approval which generally devolved from the Liberal's promise to repeal the Criminal Law Amendment Act. In the circumstances, trade union support was more comprehensible as an acknowledgement of the sterling service he had already consistently rendered.⁸³ On Tyneside, victory for Cowenite Radicalism turned most of all upon the capture of the influential Irish vote.

The significance of the Irish dimension of Tyneside Radicalism has already been demonstrated.⁸⁴ The concern here is to consider how far the Tyneside experience contrasted with that of the three cities under scrutiny. Any comparative analysis of the Irish must be approached with a certain amount of caution for, as Roger Swift has observed, there is as yet little agreement among historians regarding the most appropriate definitions or terms of reference.⁸⁵ With this in mind, the following discussion will be limited to a discussion of the political manifestations of Irish integration and its impact upon the Radical/Liberal alliance. Leicester had very few Irish residents and may therefore be discounted from the appraisal. Sheffield and Birmingham, however, had substantial numbers of Irish-born inhabitants in 1851.⁸⁶ All the available evidence suggests that, comparatively speaking, the Irish in the North East achieved a far higher level of integration.

In Sheffield, the Radical/Liberal alliance proved to be a workable compromise for both sides apart from the tensions which prevailed over the Irish question. Unlike Cowen, Mundella had a poor relationship with the Irish nationalists and he could not count on them to pledge Irish votes at election time.⁸⁷ And, as Alan O'Day has noted, the potential impact of an unpredictable Irish vote was an important consideration for politicians of both parties.⁸⁸

Mundella's high profile support for Gladstone's coercion policy in the early 1880's was unlikely to endear him to his Irish constituents, especially as many had already been alienated by his public denouncement of denominational education.⁸⁹ Wilson continually argued that Irish reforms should be put in place as a priority and all repressive measures abjured except as a last resort, but Mundella remained unconvinced:

No government can apply any remedy to the Land Laws or any other laws until they have first convinced the Irish people that Parliament and not Parnell and Co. are the real Government of the Country. ...I knew that my connection with the Government would sooner or later prove a trial to you and some others of my friends. I believe I am a member of a government more just and humane than any which has ever preceded it.⁹⁰

As Irish antagonism to the Liberals mounted in the early months of 1881, Mundella urged Robert Leader to "manfully oppose them. They deserve no quarter".⁹¹ Wilson had little real political muscle and his efforts to accommodate the needs of the Sheffield Irish were rendered ineffectual by the intransigence of his Liberal partners.

Relations with the Irish in Birmingham proved no less problematic. Sectarian violence spilled over onto the streets of both towns fuelled by the vitriol of William Murphy and the scaremongering that followed in the wake of the Fenian outrages in the 1860s.⁹² Birmingham subsequently became an important organisational centre of the Home Rule movement and Chamberlain appears to have been quite willing to express support for Butt in his bid to contest the Sheffield seat in 1874.⁹³ By 1880, when the Irish question threatened to squeeze out his plans for domestic land reform, his support was gradually withdrawn. Chamberlain's attitude to the Home Rule question was complicated by his own political ambitions and the policy adopted by Bright, who was the senior member for Birmingham at the time.⁹⁴ And, his knowledge of the Irish

problem was almost entirely based on secondhand information; relations with the Irish Nationalists were barely civil, and he had no direct experience of conditions in Ireland. Quinault argues persuasively that Chamberlain was constrained by the Unionist stance adopted by the local press and all but one of his Liberal colleagues, and he was therefore in no position to support Home Rule in 1886.⁹⁵ But there are grounds for claiming that Chamberlain's radicalism was a weaker mutation which, notwithstanding his enthusiasm for land reform, responded more to the political exigencies of the moment than the ideological principles of the past.

If, as Graham Goodlad suggests,⁹⁶ widespread ignorance of the implications of Home Rule enabled the key protagonists to exert an inordinate influence upon the voting preferences of ordinary members, it is worth noting that this was not the case on Tyneside. The Daily Chronicle, which reputedly served as a bona fide Irish newspaper, had given Irish issues unprecedented coverage and the Home Rule question had been extensively debated. Cowen's links with the Irish nationalists, and his direct participation as an executive of the Land League, placed Irish affairs at the centre of radical politics in the city to the extent that the customary divide between the two simply ceased to exist. Irish reform rested firmly within the agrarian and internationalist tradition which had moulded and shaped Tyneside radicalism for generations and the pro-Irish bias of Cowenite Radicalism ensured the continuing solidarity of radical politics.

In the 1870's when the gravitational pull of radical politics began to shift towards single issue campaigns such as Tichbornism and Anti-vaccination, the continued focus upon Irish issues protected local radicalism from a divisive sectionalism. A recent study has argued that popular support for Tichbornism demonstrates that radicalism survived Chartism.⁹⁷ There is,

however, a pressing need to consider whether the radicalism that survived bore any real resemblance to that earlier tradition beyond the redeployment of the language of 'fair play'- particularly as McWilliam states this did not embody the demand for social transformation.⁹⁸ Whereas Birmingham, Sheffield and Leicester became the focus of a good deal of Magna Charta activity, support on Tyneside was comparatively low key and the majority of North East branches were located in N.Yorkshire and on Teeside.⁹⁹ The anti-Catholicism which underpinned the movement was obviously an important factor, but local ambivalence stemmed mostly from the consensus that all land ownership was a perversion of natural justice. Tyneside radicals who had fought so hard to extend ownership of the land through various cooperative ventures remained unimpressed by the Claimant, or by the scheme put forward by Henry George in 1880 proposing compulsory confiscation of land without any compensation. The populism which increasingly dominated the radical landscape disappointed Cowen who wanted more rapid strides to be made in the direction of democracy.

McWilliam's identifies 'a yearning for an alternative morality: a desire for integrity and justice', and suggests that 'for many, this was what politics was all about'.¹⁰⁰ For Cowen, progressive political reform was the optimum means of establishing social justice; Tichbornism, and similar single issue campaigns, merely tinkered with the system. Although Irish affairs had dominated the political agenda for much of his parliamentary career he remained fully committed to electoral reform. For a brief period, this brought him into partnership with Hyndman and The Democratic Federation. In addition, Cowen's enthusiasm for working class representation stretched relations with the local Liberals to breaking point when he decided to endorse the independent labour candidate, Elijah Copland, in the 1883 elections. Many of the campaign speeches were couched in the traditional "oppositional vocabulary of patriot-

-ism,"¹⁰¹ as the Newcastle caucus were accused of corruption - of "representing their own interests."¹⁰² Men who paid taxes, defended their country and created the wealth, reasoned Cowen, "ought to be more than mere spectators in the legislative drama".¹⁰³ Ultimately, Cowen's willingness to back Copland in opposition to the official Liberal candidate exposed the deep fragility of the Radical/Liberal alliance on Tyneside.

In the wider sphere, patriotism had also proved to be a pivotal component of the new imperialism, mobilising a large section of public opinion behind Britain's supposed 'civilizing mission'.¹⁰⁴ Although fundamentally at odds with Gladstonian 'Little Englanders' such as John Morley and H.J. Wilson¹⁰⁵, Cowen's was not a lone imperialist voice. Chamberlain, who had portrayed himself as a "red-hot Little England Radical" in 1878 when association with the peace lobby seemed to be politically advantageous,¹⁰⁶ shortly afterwards welcomed the purchase of the Suez shares as "a clever thing".¹⁰⁷ As Chapter 6 has shown, Cowen's imperialism was extremely complex and although he became a fierce defender of the Empire, he remained deeply opposed to "aimless extension or factious meddling in the affairs of other nations".¹⁰⁸ The Liberal Party became deeply divided over the issue and when Wilson tried to rally the local party behind opposition to the Boer War, for example, he encountered formidable opposition.¹⁰⁹ As the editor of the Tyneside Echo noted in 1885, the Peace party had been "noisy enough when in opposition but since the Liberals followed the same course they have piped as softly as any bullfinch".¹¹⁰ Cowen was one of the few "freelancers" prepared to join a vote of censure against the Liberal's Egyptian policy in 1884.¹¹¹ Essentially, Cowen's imperialism has to be viewed against a backdrop of confused attitudes and responses. Prominent socialists such as Hyndman opposed expansion earnestly enough and yet were still committed to the defence of existing territory.¹¹²

As Richard Price notes, the radical movement as a whole failed to develop a convincing anti-imperialist critique.¹¹³

Cowen's imperialism did not endear him to the local Liberals and even his Irish friends were disturbed by the aggressive tone of his later speeches.¹¹⁴ In 1885, when Cowen finally contested the seat as an Independent candidate he was, in effect, counting on the strength of his own personal standing in the community to carry him through. Even though he had relinquished the vital support of party organisation and refused, as ever, to canvass, this was a calculated risk; personal charisma, as he was well aware, had always been his most valuable political asset. E. Biagini, in a new study of nineteenth century Liberalism, states that the successful leader of popular Liberalism required both party organisation and personal charisma.¹¹⁵ And, citing the difficulties encountered by the Newcastle Liberals when Cowen's popularity was no longer mobilised on their behalf, he concludes that, of the two, charisma was the more important. Unfortunately, Biagini's analysis is heavily weighted in favour of demonstrating the charismatic influence that Gladstone and Bright exerted over the average Liberal voter. Although he acknowledges that Cowen was "much more than a provincial demagogue"¹¹⁶ he seems reluctant to explore the possibility that, prior to 1880, his charismatic leadership had rather more local significance. The central tenet of this thesis has been that Cowenite Radicalism was unique in that it represented allegiance to the man himself, as much as to the political ideology he espoused and promoted. Without Cowen, there is a strong possibility that the Liberal vote on Tyneside would have collapsed in 1874. The Irish vote, so notoriously fickle in the 70's and 80's, was consistently cast in Cowen's favour as a pledge of faith in his political integrity, and not as a pledge of loyalty to the Liberal Party he officially represented.

Nineteenth century Liberalism clearly gained from its connection with Radicalism. In the compromises that were reached, the Radicals almost invariably paid the higher premium for their share of political power. In the North East, under Cowen's leadership, Radicalism retained its traditional roots; it remained 'the politics of opposition' - not the politics of compromise.

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- 103.COWEN PAPERS B295 14.7.1883 Speech at the Durham Miners Demonstration
- 104.see Chapter 6. many imperialists justified annexations on the grounds that Britain had a mission to bring civilization and Christianity to other nations.
- 105.R.Price:AN IMPERIAL WAR & THE BRITISH WORKING CLASS (1972)p5.
- 106.R.Jay op.cit. p37.
- 107.Ibid. p36.
- 108.COWEN PAPERS: B335 14.11.1885.
- 109.R.Price op.cit. pp41-3.
- 110.Tyneside Echo 19.1.1885
- 111.COWEN PAPERS B308 Handbill of the Scottish Liberal Association 15.3.1884 with newspaper comments attacking those (Cowen, Labouchere and Henry Richard who had voted with the Conservatives and the Parnellites; also see J.Saville:'Imperialism and the Victorians' in E.M.Sigsworth (Ed): IN SEARCH OF VICTORIAN VALUES Aspects of 19th Century Thought and Society (1988) stating that there was "much hedging in times of crisis" p173.
- 112.Ibid. p174.
- 113.Price op.cit. p234.
- 114.Ashton op.cit. p17.
- 115.E.Biagini:LIBERTY, RETRENCHMENT & REFORM (1992) p370.
- 116.Ibid.p360.

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