

Patrick O'Higgins

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Within the political historiography of the nineteenth century, Irish Chartism has been dismissed as irrelevant, and its leader, Patrick O'Higgins, has been ignored. Inevitably, Chartism in Ireland has been overshadowed by other events of the 1840s: Repeal, the Great Famine, and the well-documented successes, and failures, of the Chartist organization in Britain. Irish Chartism's lack of visibility has made it easy for historians to pay it scant attention or, as in the case of Rachel O'Higgins's writing in the early 1960s, to characterise it and its leader as failures.¹ Thirty years later, a more balanced view was presented by Takashi Hoseki.² Essentially, though, Irish Chartism and Irish Chartists still await their acceptance into mainstream Irish and British historiography. Yet, while Patrick O'Higgins remains little studied and largely unknown, during the politically turbulent decades of the 1830s and 1840s, O'Higgins was a principal player in the fast-changing kaleidoscope of Irish and British politics. He was an outspoken critic of Daniel O'Connell, and consistently challenged the limitations of the Liberator's vision for Ireland. Moreover, after 1841, O'Higgins not only led the Chartist movement in Ireland, but was widely admired within the far larger British organisation. Consequently, in 1848, he was regarded by the British authorities as one of the most dangerous men in Ireland.³

Chartism in Ireland was shaped largely by the interactions of three Irishmen: Patrick O'Higgins, President of the Irish Universal Suffrage Association (IUSA); Feargus O'Connor, Chartist leader in Britain; and Daniel O'Connell, vociferous opponent of Chartism and personal adversary of both O'Connor and O'Higgins. In the early nineteenth century, O'Connell was a dominant presence in both Irish and British politics. Although regarded as a radical, his engagement with democrats was complex. In 1837 he, together with a small number of progressive MPs, gave tacit support to the Six Demands that formed the core of Chartism (i.e. universal male suffrage, annual parliaments, no property qualifications for MPs, equal electoral districts, payment for MPs, and a secret ballot). O'Connell has even been credited with bequeathing the name 'Charter' to the movement, allegedly saying, 'There's your Charter. Agitate for it and never be content with anything less.'⁴ His sympathy proved



Figure 3 Patrick O'Higgins

short-lived with his social conservatism soon manifesting itself. According to Dorothy Thompson, in 1838 O'Connell 'made a sharp break with English radicals and endeavoured to take the whole Irish movement with him'.⁵ Moreover, he rapidly became one of the most entrenched opponents of Chartism, stating in February 1839 that Chartists had, by their 'violence, extravagance and folly, injured the cause of peaceable, but efficient reform'.⁶ His opposition intensified when Chartism sought to establish roots in Ireland.

The growth of Irish Chartism largely mirrored developments in Britain. In 1838, the 'People's Charter' had been published and, in June 1839, a petition based on the Six Demands was presented to the House of Commons. MPs overwhelmingly voted to ignore it. No Irish towns were listed as having signed the Petition.⁷ Nonetheless, about this time, a number of Irish democrats founded the Dublin Chartist Association. The secretary was L. T. Clancy. The Association did not have its own newspaper, but copies of the *Northern Star* and other Chartist journals were available at their Reading Rooms in Henry Street. An additional 200 copies of the *Northern Star* were distributed to local barber shops and public houses.⁸ The Dublin organisation requested that the British Chartist Convention send 'missionaries' to Ireland, which resulted in a visit from Robert Lowery in mid-August. The *Northern Star* reported favourably on the visit, with Lowery promising that Irish Chartists 'will join head and heart with their brethren on this side of the channel'.⁹ In fact, the meetings attended by Lowery were disrupted by O'Connell's supporters, and his visit provided the Liberator an opportunity to denounce Chartism publicly.¹⁰ The *Belfast News-Letter*, a stalwart opponent of Repeal, praised the O'Connellites who had acted with force to ensure the meetings did not take place.¹¹ From London, O'Connell wrote to Irish newspapers, again denouncing the 'wicked' Chartists and praising his followers. He also intimated that he was about to revive the Repeal movement – 'every day makes me more and more convinced that there is not the least hope of justice for Ireland from the British parliament'.¹² However, Chartism did not disappear immediately. At the end of 1839, Clancy organised a collection on behalf of John Frost, Welsh leader of the Newport Rising, who had been found guilty of High Treason. Within Dublin, 25 people subscribed.¹³ Nonetheless, the first Irish Chartist venture was floundering, and it collapsed when Clancy moved to England in 1840.¹⁴ Clancy continued to write for the *Northern Star*, regularly attacking the duplicity of O'Connell.¹⁵

Revival came in 1841. Following a number of meetings throughout the summer by Dublin Chartists, the IUSA was founded in August. Its first – and only – president was Patrick O'Higgins. O'Higgins had been born in Ballymagrahan, County Down in 1799, but had moved to Dublin to work in the woollen trade. By the late 1820s, he had established a successful business in 14 (later 15) North Anne Street.¹⁶ His political radicalism and leadership qualities had become evident as early as 1831, when he chaired a meeting in

Dublin attacking Toryism. The meeting was reported in the London press.¹⁷ Like Feargus O'Connor, O'Higgins had been an early ally of Daniel O'Connell, supporting his campaigns for Catholic Emancipation and Repeal. O'Higgins later claimed to be 'the person who got up the first meeting in Ireland for the O'Connell tribute, and the second who contributed £10 to it'.¹⁸ O'Higgins's and O'Connell's subsequent relationship was dominated by both political and personal disagreements. At the beginning of 1833, O'Connell supported O'Higgins's dismissal from the Irish Volunteers movement, founded to invoke the spirit of 1782.¹⁹ The expulsion resulted in the collapse of O'Higgins's woolen business.²⁰ Regardless, O'Higgins continued to support O'Connell publicly. About this time, he came under the influence of William Cobbett, leading him to believe that the social and political ills of Ireland could only be resolved through parliamentary reform and universal suffrage.²¹ To disseminate these views, in 1834 O'Higgins co-founded a newspaper, the *Tribune*. His co-editor was Antrim-born James Whittle, former editor of the *Manchester and Salford Advertiser*.²² The *Tribune* promoted O'Connell's Repeal movement, reform of the Church of Ireland, and universal suffrage.²³ The paper was short-lived, however, its final edition appearing on 3 January 1835. Whittle returned to the north of England where he became involved with British Chartism, while expressing support for O'Higgins's activities.²⁴ O'Higgins and O'Connell clashed again in 1835 when O'Higgins was expelled from the Dublin-based Trades Political Union for his criticisms of the Whig Party, who were about to become allies of O'Connell. For O'Higgins and many other democrats, O'Connell's participation in the 1835 Lichfield House Compact (an agreement between the Whigs, the Repeal Party and parliamentary radicals) represented a betrayal of both Irish nationalists and workers throughout the United Kingdom (UK).²⁵

Regardless of his radicalism, O'Higgins remained aloof from the Dublin Chartist Association due to personal differences with Clancy.²⁶ Although not directly involved, he had championed the actions of his countrymen, pointing out to the National Convention in Britain that the failure of the first Chartist project in Ireland was inevitable given the strength of the opposition they had faced.²⁷ Undaunted by the prospect of similar opposition, O'Higgins launched the IUSA. The first secretary was Peter Michael Brophy, a Protestant weaver. Accusations by O'Connell that he was an Orangeman resulted in him losing his job in Dublin and emigrating to England.²⁸ Brophy was succeeded by W. H. Dyott, a printer, newsagent and distributor of the *Northern Star* in Ireland.²⁹ Like O'Higgins, Dyott had been associated with the Trades Political Union and had been a fierce and outspoken critic of O'Connell's undermining of trade union activity.³⁰ The treasurer was William Woodward, who, at one of the early meetings, made it clear what he saw as the Irish lineage of the IUSA, 'We are now commencing on the same principles as was done in 1794 when the people of Ireland demanded universal suffrage, vote by ballot and annual

parliaments.³¹ The reference to the United Irishmen would have been anathema to O'Connell. Another prominent member was Thomas Lee.³²

To explain its aims, the IUSA published a three-page Prospectus entitled 'What is a Chartist?'³³ O'Higgins also ordered 1,000 copies of a similarly named publication from Britain, together with reproductions of the People's Charter, explaining that they were for 'distribution amongst the industrious classes of this city (Dublin), amongst whom I am happy to say the principles are taking deep root and spreading rapidly'.³⁴ To build a foundation of working-class support, the Standing Committee of the IUSA was to comprise of thirteen members, a majority (seven) of whom were to be 'working men'. Five members constituted a quorum, but only if at least three of them were working men. A fee was required: two pence to join and a weekly subscription of one penny.³⁵ Similarly to O'Connell's recently formed Repeal Association, the IUSA was committed to using constitutional means to achieve its ends, reflected in its motto 'Peace – Law – Order'.³⁶ It also modelled itself on the National Charter Association, founded in Britain in 1840, the Irish organisation declaring as its aims to be the Six Demands, explaining: 'That every male inhabitant of Britain and Ireland (infants, insane persons and criminals only excepted) is by common right and the laws of God, a free man and entitled to the full employment of political liberty ... therefore the right to UNIVERSAL SUFFRAGE is an inherent right'. From the outset, the IUSA supported Repeal, and its membership card listed 'Repeal of the Legislative Union' as a seventh demand.³⁷ In 1842, O'Higgins published a pamphlet entitled 'Chartism and Repeal'.³⁸ In it, he located the demand for Repeal as part of the natural justice that would follow from granting universal suffrage, rather than being an end in itself, arguing, 'no mere change of masters will suffice; tyranny would not be a bit more amiable by being brought closer'.³⁹ By framing their demands in this way, O'Higgins and his followers were implicitly challenging O'Connell's narrower view of Irish independence.

O'Higgins challenged O'Connell even more directly. On the eve of the general election in summer 1841, he collected thirty signatures from voters in Dublin who had agreed that they would only support O'Connell's candidacy if he gave written support to universal suffrage and the other demands of the Charter.⁴⁰ O'Connell refused. Retaliation from O'Connell and his followers was swift, public and unequivocal. In August, a number of repealers forced their way into a Chartist meeting at O'Higgins's home, and attempted to break it up. Their actions were defended by O'Connell.⁴¹ Disingenuously, while O'Connell repeatedly stated that his opposition to Chartists (and later to Young Ireland) was based on their use of physical force, his own followers frequently employed violent tactics to intimidate their opponents.⁴² The weekly Repeal meetings in Dublin provided regular opportunities for denouncing O'Higgins and his followers. In the course of the meeting held on 17 August 1841, O'Connell

described Chartism as existing on a 'paltry scale', while claiming that 'those miserable Chartists' did not amount to more than twenty in Dublin.⁴³

Only a few weeks later, O'Connell introduced an uncompromising resolution at the Repeal Association meeting, which was to be forwarded to fellow repealers in Britain and in North America, 'cautioning them against any species of connection with the Chartists, and begging of them to exclude all known Chartists from their meetings'. Repealers who did not observe this dictum would themselves be expelled. O'Connell provided many reasons for his opposing the Chartists: they had supported the Tory Party; they were violent; they opposed Repeal and were 'enemies of Ireland'. He also suggested that radical democratic politics were imported, and not native to Ireland. O'Connell urged his supporters to avoid 'contaminating the pure and holy cause of Repeal with the torch and dagger turbulence of unprincipled Chartism'.⁴⁴ Accusations that its supporters were infidels or Orangemen consolidated the opposition of the Catholic Church, which had little time for Chartism anyway.⁴⁵ Increasingly, O'Connell attacked the leader of Irish Chartism, 'Paddy O'Higgins'. The personal attacks on O'Higgins led a number of Irish Chartists to publish a letter calling on O'Connell to withdraw his 'unmeasured, uncensored, and, we trust, thoughtlessly conferred censure'. The letter was signed by thirteen men, who claimed to be speaking on behalf of 600 others.⁴⁶

Political differences between O'Connell and O'Higgins were occasionally overshadowed by personal antagonism. Lacking his own newspaper, the Chartist leader used the *Freeman's Journal* to spar with O'Connell. This included demanding an apology for his expulsion from the Irish Volunteers. O'Connell responded dismissively, explaining the 'facts' of the case to the paper's readership.⁴⁷ As late as 1843, O'Higgins was still demanding that the money he had given to O'Connell should be returned to him.⁴⁸ In turn, within the newly opened Reconciliation Hall, O'Higgins was denounced as 'a calumniator, a habitual liar, a slanderer'.⁴⁹ Into 1845, O'Higgins was still trying to defend his name from the dispute that had taken place twelve years earlier.⁵⁰ The publicly argued dispute between the *Liberator* and the Chartist leader had little to do with universal suffrage. In many ways, the dispute paralleled the rift between O'Connell and Feargus O'Connor; a rift that was as acrimonious as it was public, and as much based on personal as political differences.

Regardless of entrenched opposition by O'Connell, the IUSA enjoyed more success than its predecessor. Precise membership numbers are not known, but its activities were sufficiently significant to be monitored by the police in Dublin who reported its rapid spread throughout Dublin. Within a few months of being established, it had established branches in other urban centres, including Belfast, Drogheda, Loughrea and Newry.⁵¹ It also had sympathisers in Cork.⁵² By the end of 1841, the Association claimed a membership of 1,000.⁵³ However, by 1843 – the so-called Repeal

Year – it had reached only 1,055.⁵⁴ Despite its small size, the activities of the IUSA were well known to British Chartists. Helped by Feargus O'Connor's personal interest, the Irish organisation received extensive coverage in the *Northern Star*, with O'Higgins being a regular contributor. Since the founding of the British movement also, O'Higgins had regularly attended the major Chartist conventions, often being called on to speak or act as a chairperson.⁵⁵ In early 1844, O'Higgins was elected to represent London in the forthcoming National Convention to be held in Manchester. O'Higgins was the only candidate to be elected unanimously: there had been three objections to Feargus O'Connor. As a delegate, O'Higgins received a wage of five shillings for each day that he attended.⁵⁶

In May 1842, a second Chartist petition was presented to Westminster. The Charter contained over three million signatures, including an unknown number from Ireland. In Belfast alone, an estimated 2,000 people signed, suggesting that support for the Six Demands extended beyond membership of the IUSA.⁵⁷ Surprisingly, shortly after the petition's rejection, O'Connell made a speech in Dublin in which he said he supported the 'People's Charter'. This pronouncement led O'Higgins to pass a motion at a meeting of the IUSA congratulating the Liberator for his support, but criticising O'Connell for having suggested that the meetings of the IUSA were carried out in 'a back parlour' in North Anne Street. O'Connell's actions suggest that while he was willing to agree with the Chartists' demands, he did not support their representative organisations. Perhaps in retaliation, a few days later, O'Higgins introduced a motion into the IUSA stating that: 'It is obvious that the Union cannot be repealed until the power be first given to the people to return Repeal representatives, and that, therefore, the agitation for Universal Suffrage should precede and be paramount to the agitation of every other question.'⁵⁸

It was not only O'Connell who had an uneasy relationship with the Irish Chartists. The relationship between the IUSA and the authorities remained tense, with O'Higgins complaining at the end of the 1842 that the Dublin police had removed a placard from outside his home announcing the change of time of a meeting of the IUSA.⁵⁹ In spring 1843, the Suffrage Association became embroiled in a public dispute with the Catholic Emigration Society whom it accused of 'wilful, base and wicked falsehood, and of sending poor emigrants to Canada on vessels OF THE VERY WORST DESCRIPTION'.⁶⁰ O'Connell's declaration that this was the year in which he would achieve Repeal led to increased support for him from British Chartists. O'Higgins disapproved of this fraternisation and urged his fellow Chartists not to join the Repeal Association 'without first understanding and thoroughly approving of the objects and rules of such Association'. He argued that Repeal did not support political equality.⁶¹ The debacle at Clontarf in October 1843, when O'Connell called off a monster meeting at the last minute following its banning

by the authorities, dealt a serious blow to the Repeal movement. O'Connell's subsequent arrest, trial and brief imprisonment increased sympathy for the 68-year-old Liberator. During O'Connell's brief time in jail, Chartist meetings were formally suspended out of respect to him. However, tensions between Chartism and Repeal continued. A special meeting of the IUSA was convened on 10 March 1844:

for the purpose of moving a vote of thanks to his Worship the Mayor of Cork, to Joseph Hayes Esq. and all those who at a public meeting of the citizens of Cork, made an open, manly and honest avowal of the principles of the PEOPLE'S CHARTER – the only redress for the grievances of the working classes.⁶²

The Mayor, William Trant Fagan, was a staunch supporter of O'Connell, so the announcement may have been deliberately provocative.⁶³

The defeat of Repeal and the imprisonment of O'Connell took its toll on politics in Ireland. In August 1844, meetings of the IUSA were formally discontinued. O'Higgins revealed that for four years he had been subsidising the movement at a cost of between £60 and £83 a year. He promised that the meetings would resume in January 1845.⁶⁴ The failure of the Repeal Year also ultimately increased divisions within the nationalist movement. Increasingly, O'Connell was facing an internal challenge to his authority from the young writers associated with the *Nation*. The departure of 'Young Ireland' from the Repeal Association in summer 1846, ostensibly over the question of physical force, further dented nationalist politics in Ireland. During these years also, Chartism, in both Ireland and Britain, was largely in the doldrums, the tactic of presenting monster petitions having failed.

The antagonism between O'Higgins and O'Connell, which had dragged on since 1833, took a more ominous turn at the end of 1845 when the latter turned in information regarding the allegedly seditious activities of the Chartists. Consequently, on 26 December, O'Higgins was taken before the Dublin magistrates charged with 'seditious libel' for: 'Wickedly, maliciously, and seditiously contriving and intending to stir up and excite discontent and sedition among the subjects of the Queen; that is to say, between the landlords of Ireland and their tenants.' O'Higgins was accused of publishing a pamphlet entitled *Landlords and Tenants – Tyrants Turning Tenants Out*, a copy of which had been placed on the doors of Conciliation Hall. O'Connell had retaliated by sending it to the police.⁶⁵ The case of the Queen v. Patrick O'Higgins came before Justice Barton on 15 February 1846. He was granted bail.⁶⁶ In the pamphlet, O'Higgins had argued that tenants should receive compensation for improvements to their property. Although rejected by the Repeal movement in 1845, in 1848 O'Higgins's ideas were championed by a radicalised John Mitchel, who reprinted the pamphlet in his newspaper.⁶⁷

O'Higgins's ardour was not dampened by his brief sojourn in Newgate Prison, he spending the following months issuing addresses to the Irish in

Britain urging them not to support O'Connell.⁶⁸ According to a Repeal warden in London, they were read widely and regarded positively.⁶⁹ O'Higgins's experience increased his high standing among British Chartists. *Northern Star* readers were told, '*Patrick O'Higgins* – a name that will ever live in the hearts of the English Chartists, because they know that the greater portion of his suffering has been a consequence of his steadfast adherence to their principles.'⁷⁰ At this stage, O'Higgins clearly had achieved some notoriety as his portrait, drawn by George Mulvanny, was being displayed in the Royal Hibernian Academy.⁷¹ Moreover, copies of his image, carved on steel, were being given out free with copies of the *Northern Star*.

In order to dignify and commemorate those who boldly defy the law, the approver and the tyrant, when our principles are at stake, we will, as soon as the work can be completed, present to every subscriber of the *Star* from Saturday 17 January 1846, a Splendid Portrait, from a steel engraving of PATRICK O'HIGGINS Esq. the Chief of the Irish Chartists; and, perhaps, the attitude of triumph in which our friend will be represented, and the thing triumphed over, may be anything but flattering to his persecutors.⁷²

To accompany the portrait, the paper included a memoir of O'Higgins explaining his reasons for seceding from O'Connell. This recognition made O'Higgins one of the thirty-four people featured in portrait during the paper's fifteen-year existence.⁷³ At the end of 1850, his steel engraving was reproduced and again distributed, this time as part of a series of 'Portraits of Patriots'.⁷⁴

In the summer of 1846 tensions between Young Ireland and Old Ireland came to a head, leading to a public split. Young Ireland included some of the most radical members of the Repeal Association, so an alliance with Chartism appeared possible. However, in the succeeding months the various political groups danced around each other as they sought to define themselves in relation to a weakened Repeal Association. The outspoken Mitchel, a prominent member of Young Ireland, believed a new alliance was unnecessary, writing: 'We desire no fraternization between the Irish people and the Chartists, not on account of the bugbear of physical force, but simply because some of their five [*sic*] points to us are an abomination.'⁷⁵

Within the IUSA, Dyott was equally antagonistic to Young Ireland, describing their form of nationalism as 'spurious'.⁷⁶ Nonetheless, new alliances were being explored. In December 1846, O'Higgins attended a meeting of Young Ireland in the Rotunda. He explained that he did so from curiosity rather than sympathy – 'to see and hear the young gentlemen of whose eloquence he had heard much.'⁷⁷

O'Connell's hegemony was being challenged in other ways. In October 1846, the trade unions in Dublin presented a 'Remonstrance' to Daniel O'Connell, signed by 15,000 people, objecting to an alliance with the new Whig Government and to the treatment of Young Ireland. John O'Connell, who was

increasingly taking on the mantle of being his father's political heir, suggested it should be thrown into the gutter.⁷⁸ The Remonstrance was printed by Dyott, Secretary of the IUSA.⁷⁹ It paved the way for a new political grouping.⁸⁰ At the beginning of 1847, Young Ireland created the Irish Confederation, and a sister organisation, the Trades and Citizens' committee, led by William Bryan and A. P. Barry, was formed. One of their aims was to bring closer co-operation between the Confederation and the Chartists.⁸¹ O'Connell's death in May 1847, again allowed for new political configurations in a post-O'Connell Ireland.

In January 1848, despite some opposition, the Confederates and the Chartists held a joint meeting in Dublin.⁸² Around the same time, a radicalised Mitchel departed from the Irish Confederation, arguing that a national revolution had to be accompanied by a social one.⁸³ In the third issue of his new paper, the *United Irishman*, he asked for more unity between radicals throughout the UK, arguing 'Every Chartist is a Repealer, to begin with: and all English labourers and artisans are Chartists'.⁸⁴ Mitchel made clear his new-found admiration for Patrick O'Higgins too.⁸⁵ The French Revolution at the end of February 1848 was welcomed by radicals and democrats throughout Europe. Delegations of British Chartists and Irish Confederates visited Paris in late February and early March respectively to congratulate the Provisional Government.⁸⁶ In the wake of the revolution, there were signs that Chartism and Repeal were moving closer together. O'Higgins, O'Connor, William Smith O'Brien and John Mitchel were invited to speak at a large meeting to be held in Manchester on 17 March. O'Higgins accepted believing that it would lay the foundation for an alliance, 'which, in my humble opinion, will ultimately, and at no very remote period, overthrow tyranny and repression in both countries'.⁸⁷ He subsequently withdrew on the grounds that insufficient attention would be given to the demand for suffrage.⁸⁸ Feargus O'Connor clearly did not share these qualms and attended, as did the young Confederate Thomas Francis Meagher, who declared to an audience of an estimated 8,000 people, 'the revolution in France has made me a democrat'.⁸⁹ On 10 April 1848, the third Chartist Petition was presented to Parliament. Despite the new mood of optimism amongst radicals, it had fewer signatures than the 1842 petition. It was treated with derision by the majority of parliamentarians, having the support of only 15 MPs, three of whom were prominent Irish politicians – John O'Connell, Feargus O'Connor and William Sharman Crawford.⁹⁰

Regardless of the latest defeat for Chartism, O'Higgins was busy within Ireland. In early April, he convened a meeting in the Princess Theatre in Lower Abbey St, 'to adopt the best, the surest, and the shortest plan to Repeal the Union, and also to secure the rights of the working classes'.⁹¹ It marked a formal re-launch of the IUSA. It also suggested that his political priorities were changing. A week later, at the invitation of the 'Citizens of Dublin', a delegation of English Chartists visited Ireland and spoke at a meeting that featured O'Higgins and Mitchel. Mitchel preceded his speech by saying 'there is



nothing more feared by the English government than an alliance between the Irish and English people.⁹² His words were prescient. The British Government, alarmed by the possibility of a coalition between Irish and British radicals, encouraged by a sympathetic France, introduced extraordinary repressive legislation, which introduced a draconian Treason-Felony Act.⁹³ An early target was Mitchel, who was sentenced to transportation in May 1848. O'Higgins subscribed to a collection for Mitchel's wife and family.⁹⁴ Around the same time, O'Higgins demonstrated his support for the aims of Young Ireland and was duly elected president of the '98 Confederate Club in Dublin. This club, like many in Ireland, appeared to be preparing for an armed uprising.⁹⁵

The summer of 1848 was marked by the arrest of radicals in Ireland and Britain. The arrests intensified following the suspension of Habeas Corpus in Ireland on 22 July. Warrants were issued for the arrest of Confederate leaders. The three most wanted men were listed as William Smith O'Brien, Thomas Francis Meagher and Patrick O'Higgins.⁹⁶ On 27 July, raids were carried out by the Dublin police on the homes of leading nationalists and Chartists. According to the London *Times* they were carried out at dawn and Patrick O'Higgins was one of those arrested. Guns and a pike were alleged to have been found on his business premises in Anne St, although it was acknowledged that hunting was his hobby.⁹⁷ An Irish newspaper, in contrast, reported that the police had searched the premises of 'the well-known Chartist' at 1.00 p.m. and found 700 gun stocks, a pike and a gun. Whatever the details, O'Higgins was arrested under the recently introduced Treason-Felony Act and imprisoned in Kilmainham Goal.⁹⁸ Newspapers throughout Britain reported his arrest, describing him as the leader of Chartism in Ireland, with a few mentioning that he was a Confederate.⁹⁹ Two days following O'Higgins's arrest, a small rising took place in Ballingarry in County Tipperary. It was easily defeated and marked an end to what had been the 'springtime of the people' in Ireland, as both Chartist and nationalist aspirations were crushed by a powerful and determined British state.

O'Higgins remained in Kilmainham Gaol for three weeks. On 19 August, he and thirteen other political prisoners were moved to Belfast, to the newly opened Crumlin Road Gaol. They were returned to Kilmainham on 20 December, presumably after the perceived revolutionary threat was over.¹⁰⁰ Regardless of O'Higgins's incarceration, he signed a petition protesting against the sentencing of William Smith O'Brien to death.¹⁰¹ At the beginning of 1849, O'Higgins was still in Kilmainham. The *Belfast News-Letter* suggested that he and five other state prisoners were being badly treated and that 'outrages on the person are alleged to have been committed by the officials'.¹⁰² In March, the Lord Lieutenant ordered the release of six prisoners, including O'Higgins.¹⁰³ An unlooked casualty of his time in prison was a book of Irish bardic poetry that was to have been translated by Charles Clarence Mangan. O'Higgins had been financing the venture, which was to have included the writings of his own

ancestors, who had been chiefs in Westmeath and Connacht. O'Higgins's detention and the untimely death of Mangan put an end to this literary venture.¹⁰⁴

Regardless of his imprisonment, O'Higgins's participation in politics continued, albeit in a different form. Following his release, he joined the short-lived Irish Democratic Association set up by Bernard Fullam. Through its newspaper, the *Irishman*, Fullam sought to fuse socialist with nationalist aspirations.¹⁰⁵ O'Higgins was also elected to a committee, centred around the re-issued *Nation*.¹⁰⁶ The committee had the support of Feargus O'Connor, although even following O'Connell's death, he remained a controversial figure in Ireland.¹⁰⁷ In November 1849, a National Convention was held in Dublin to provide a forum for nationalists and, again, O'Higgins was a prominent speaker.¹⁰⁸ In September 1850, O'Higgins announced that he would stand in the approaching municipal election for the Inns Quay Ward, as an Independent. His candidacy was opposed by John O'Connell who, as his father had previously, dismissed him as 'Paddy O'Higgins, the Chartist'. O'Higgins replied by asking, 'is it a crime to be a Chartist?' and challenged O'Connell to a public debate on the topic. Further public correspondence followed in which O'Higgins pilloried the O'Connell family for not keeping their parliamentary pledges.¹⁰⁹

At the beginning of 1851, O'Higgins accepted an invitation from the Manchester Council of the National Charter Association to a dinner to honour O'Connor.¹¹⁰ He also continued to address the Chartists of Britain through the *Northern Star*, largely writing in defence of the increasingly tarnished leader, Feargus O'Connor. O'Higgins's position clearly had some support, the Chartists of Derby thanking him publicly for his 'manly letter'. At the end of the year, O'Higgins wrote to the 'Chartists of Great Britain', again chastising them – for their public divisions, their apathy and their most recent attacks on O'Connor. He admitted that he had, for some time, 'ceased to belong to any political society', but described the Chartist movement as 'the only society in the British empire having for its object the political and social redemption of a people, a noble, a generous and a just people, now on the very abyss of immediate serfdom, slavery and degradation'.¹¹¹ Clearly, O'Higgins had not severed his relations with Chartism. In March 1852, he travelled to London to attend a Metropolitan Delegate Meeting, at which he agreed to speak to William Sharman Crawford MP on their behalf. One of the purposes of this association was to raise an annuity for Feargus O'Connor.¹¹²

By the early 1850s, O'Higgins's business was suffering, the value of his premises in Anne St having fallen by over 10 per cent.¹¹³ Nonetheless, his passion for politics seemed undiminished. In 1853, he wrote a pamphlet praising the Lord Lieutenant for his support for tenant right. The pamphlet was recommended in the *Nation* as 'an interesting work'.¹¹⁴ It was to be his final one. O'Higgins died on 12 October 1854 of diarrhoea. The Irish notice of his death stated that he had been 'identified for some years with the *English agitation* [my italics] for universal suffrage and other points of the Charter'. It went on to say that

he had suffered for his principles.¹¹⁵ His death was also reported in the British press.¹¹⁶ O'Higgins was buried in Glasnevin Cemetery in Dublin. His gravestone read, 'The O'Higgins, an active leader in the Chartist movement, and President of the Universal Suffrage Association'.¹¹⁷ O'Higgins's personal effects were sold by public auction. They included the lease of his house, his household furniture, 'a large beam, scales and weights, crane and windlass', remnants of his woollen business. Also put up for sale were 'two hundred and fifty guns stocks, a pair of highly trained setter dogs', which reflected his love of hunting.¹¹⁸ O'Higgins's home and business premises remained vacant for over two years.¹¹⁹ It was a sad and solitary ending for a man who had devoted so much of his life to trying to improve the lives of other people.

Just as Irish Chartism was largely forgotten, so was its leader. In 1888, William O'Neill Daunt, a former supporter of O'Connell, wrote a book eulogising the Liberator. Inevitably, he was dismissive of Chartism in general and Patrick O'Higgins in particular, saying of the latter, 'In Dublin there lived a Mr Patrick O'Higgins, who got up a nibbling opposition to O'Connell, and devoted a room at the back of his house to the reception of a few discontented deserters from O'Connellism'.¹²⁰ Historians followed suit. The role of Irishmen in British Chartism has long been recognised. The fact that many of the leaders were Irish-born, suggests that British and Irish politics were more porous than has sometimes been suggested, and that the working classes within the UK shared similar aspirations. These similarities were highlighted in the columns of O'Connor's *Northern Star*, particularly in verse, 'Thus, at a time when the alien nature of the Irish was being emphasized in the wider culture, Chartist poets were insisting not just on a common cause, but on shared characteristics'.¹²¹ O'Higgins, despite being an Irishman who lived in Ireland, was popular with Chartists in Britain and he, in turn, remained loyal to their cause and to their increasingly controversial leader. However, O'Higgins's interest was not simply in parliamentary reform, but included tenant rights, cultural nationalism and Irish independence. His early commitment to male suffrage meant that he was more progressive than the majority of Irish repealers, many of whom only came to embrace democratic demands in 1848.

Why did Irish Chartism not flourish? While O'Connell and Repeal had to deal with the hostility of the British establishment, O'Higgins had to face the formidable triple hostility of the British establishment, the Catholic Church, and the Liberator. In 1844, O'Connell boasted that he had kept Chartism in check, claiming that without his opposition it would have 'passed over and spread from one end of Ireland to the other'.¹²² O'Higgins suffered personally also. The multiple public attacks made on him led the *Nation* to refer to him as 'a political outcast in Ireland'.¹²³ The brief flowering of Chartism in Ireland, however, provided an early example of grassroots co-operation between various political groups and across the Irish Sea. O'Higgins played a crucial role in creating a bridge from Irish to British Chartism, being admired

by all factions within the latter. In the words of his greatest admirer, Feargus O'Connor: 'When it was dangerous to advocate our principles, and almost death publicly to advocate and promulgate them, O'Higgins kept the spark of Chartism alive in the damp atmosphere of Dublin.'¹²⁴

Neither British nor Irish Chartism, nor, indeed, Repeal, could survive their various encounters with the British State in 1848. According to John Saville, Chartism was only 'finally broken by the physical force of the state, and once having been defeated, it was submerged in the national consciousness, beneath layers of false understanding and denigration.'¹²⁵ Moreover, the Great Famine changed Ireland in numerous ways, not least in regard to labour. As Emmet O'Connor has argued, 'trade unionism became weaker as a force and workers became weaker as a class'.¹²⁶ Although the Chartist and Repeal movements may have disappeared after 1848, their demands and aspirations did not, remaining central to later radical and nationalist movements. However, while the next generation of British radicals moved towards reformist tactics, in Ireland the next generation of nationalists looked to physical force Fenianism. The world in which Patrick O'Higgins had founded the Chartist organisation had disappeared. His attempts to fuse universal suffrage with Repeal, using peaceful means only, appeared irrelevant in post-Famine Ireland. Nonetheless, O'Higgins's contribution to radical, democratic and nationalist politics in both Ireland and Britain during the tempestuous political atmosphere of the 1840s deserves more research and recognition.

Notes

- 1 Rachel O'Higgins, 'The Irish influence on the Chartist movement', *Past and Present*, 20 (1961), pp. 83–96.
- 2 Takashi Hoseki, 'Patrick O'Higgins and Irish Chartism', *Comparative Aspects of Irish and Japanese History* (Hosei University, 1993), pp. 148–77.
- 3 British Parliamentary Papers (BPP), 'Habeas Corpus Suspension Act (Ireland)', 8 February 1849, House of Commons, 1849 (97), xlix, 385, p. 381.
- 4 Rev. Edgar Sanderson, *A Popular Review of Political Work During the Reign of Queen Victoria* (Leeds: Frederick R. Spark, 1887), p. 18.
- 5 Dorothy Thompson, 'Ireland and the Irish in English Radicalism before 1850', in James Epstein and Dorothy Thompson (eds), *The Chartist Experience: Studies in Working-Class Radicalism and Culture, 1830–1860* (London: Macmillan, 1982), p. 133.
- 6 *Tuam Herald*, 16 February 1839.
- 7 *Champion and Weekly Herald*, 30 June, 1839, quoted in: www.chartists.net/Chartist-petitions.htm#first, accessed 10 April 2013.
- 8 *Northern Star*, 27 July 1839. The *Northern Star*, the leading British Chartist newspaper, had been established by O'Connor in 1837.
- 9 *Northern Star*, 17 August 1839.

- 10 *Freeman's Journal*, 13–14 August 1839.
- 11 *Belfast News-Letter*, 16 August 1839.
- 12 Letter of O'Connell to Mr T. Ray, 15 August 1839, *Freeman's Journal*, 19 August 1839.
- 13 *Northern Star*, 18 January 1840.
- 14 Hoseki, 'Patrick O'Higgins and Irish Chartism', p. 150.
- 15 Clancy penned 'Scraps for Radicals. Song of the Irish Absentees', *Northern Star*, 2 July 1842 (there were a number of versions).
- 16 This date of birth was given when he was imprisoned in Kilmainham in 1848. The *Dictionary of Irish Biography* gives it as 1790. The *Dublin Directory* for 1829 lists 'O'Higgins and Shaw, Manchester and Stuff Warehouse', p. 111; by the 1840s, the property was valued at £32; *Henry Shaw's Dublin City Directory* (Dublin, 1850).
- 17 *London Standard*, 24 April 1831.
- 18 *Freeman's Journal*, 14 August 1841.
- 19 In a letter to P. V. Fitzpatrick, O'Connell stated, 'O'Higgins, who owes me a grudge since the affair of Reynold's letter, to insinuate I know not what against me', 19 June 1833, in Daniel O'Connell, *Correspondence of Daniel O'Connell, the Liberator* (Dublin: Longmans, 1888), p. 365.
- 20 O'Higgins to Editor, *Freeman's Journal*, 21 August 1841.
- 21 Hoseki, 'Patrick O'Higgins and Irish Chartism', p. 149.
- 22 J. E. Cornish, *Manchester Streets and Manchester Men* (Manchester: J. E. Cornish, 1907), vol. 2, p. 278.
- 23 Hoseki, 'Patrick O'Higgins and Irish Chartism', p. 149.
- 24 Lowell L. Blaisdell, 'James Whittle, Chartist editor', *The Journal of the Rutgers University Libraries*, 41:2 (1979), pp. 109–11.
- 25 Bernard Reaney, 'Irish Chartism in Britain and Ireland: rescuing the rank and file', *Saothar*, 10 (1984), pp. 94–103.
- 26 Hoseki, 'Patrick O'Higgins and Irish Chartism', p. 150.
- 27 *Champion and Weekly Herald*, 15 September 1839.
- 28 Hoseki, 'Patrick O'Higgins and Irish Chartism', p. 152.
- 29 Dyott's title and address were 'W. H. Dyott, Printing Office, Lending Library, Periodical and New Depot, 26 North King Street'.
- 30 W. H. Dyott, *A Vindication of the Tradesmen of Dublin from the Late Calamitous Charges of Daniel O'Connell* (Dublin: W. H. Dyott, 1838).
- 31 Meeting of 2 October 1841, quoted in Reaney, 'Irish Chartism in Britain', p. 101.
- 32 *Northern Star*, 17 July 1841.
- 33 Few copies have survived but an original is available in the Richard Dowden Papers, Cork City and County Archives: www.corkarchives.ie/media/U140web.pdf, accessed 8 March 2013.
- 34 O'Higgins to Mr Cleave, 6 March 1841, in *Northern Star*, 10 July 1841.
- 35 *Rules of the Irish Universal Suffrage Association* (Dublin: W. H. Dyott, 1841), p. 17.
- 36 Their Charter was reprinted in *United Irishman*, 4 March 1848.
- 37 Membership card of James Moir, reproduced in Alexander Wilson, *The Chartist Movement in Scotland* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1970), p. 208.

- 38 *Chartism and Repeal: An Address to the Repealers of Ireland by a member of the Irish Universal Suffrage Association* (Dublin: W. H. Dyott, 1842).
- 39 *United Irishman*, 11 March 1848.
- 40 O'Higgins' placard was dated 5 July 1841, *Northern Star*, 17 July 1841.
- 41 *Freeman's Journal*, 14 August 1844.
- 42 Christine Kinealy, *Repeal and Revolution: 1848 in Ireland* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2009).
- 43 *Freeman's Journal*, 18 August 1841.
- 44 American Irish Historical Society, New York, Letter from T. M. Ray (LNRA) to Charles Conor, 13 September 1841, Box Three, Folder 12.
- 45 *Freeman's Journal*, 29 December 1841.
- 46 The letter was signed by W. H. Dyott, Henry Clarke, Thomas O'Brien, Patrick Rafter, John Norton, John Keegan, Patrick McMahon, K. Dunne, Patrick O'Connell, Edward Dempsey, Patrick McCarten, James Dillon and Patrick O'Connor, *Freeman's Journal*, 10 January 1842.
- 47 See letters from both men in *Freeman's Journal*, 9 April 1842.
- 48 *Freeman's Journal*, 30 September 1843.
- 49 Tom Steele defended O'Connell; O'Higgins described Steele as 'you cowardly runaway slanderer – you strolling, houseless vagabond', *Freeman's Journal*, 4–5 October 1843.
- 50 *Freeman's Journal*, 29 August 1845.
- 51 O'Higgins, 'The Irish influence on the Chartist movement', pp. 89–90.
- 52 John O'Rourke, Cork wrote to O'Higgins on 11 September 1841 asking for six copies of the *Northern Star* to be sent to him every week, *Northern Star*, 18 September 1847.
- 53 Dorothy Thompson, *Outsiders: Class, Gender, and Nation* (London: Verso, 1993), p. 119.
- 54 Dyott, in *Reasons for Seceding from the 'Seceders' by an Ex-Member of the Irish Confederation* (Dublin: W. H. Dyott, 1847), p. 5, suggests 1,055 members.
- 55 In 1838, he spoke in Huddersfield: he chaired the conventions in Birmingham and Manchester in 1843 and 1844 respectively.
- 56 *Freeman's Journal*, 11 March, 6 April 1844.
- 57 Christine Kinealy, "'Brethren in bondage': Chartists, O'Connellites, Young Irelanders and the 1848 Rising', in Fintan Lane and Donal Ó Drisceoil (eds), *Politics and the Irish Working Class* (Basingstoke: Palgrave, 2005), p. 93. There were exceptions – in March 1843 O'Higgins recorded he had received £6 from Rev. Monk of St Audeon's parish; *Freeman's Journal*, 28 March 1843.
- 58 *Freeman's Journal*, 18 August, 1 September 1842.
- 59 *Freeman's Journal*, 1 December 1842.
- 60 *Freeman's Journal*, 28 March 1843.
- 61 *Freeman's Journal*, 15 July 1843.
- 62 *Freeman's Journal*, 9 March 1844; *Cork Post Office General Directory for 1844*, p. 161.
- 63 William Trant Fagan, *The Life and Times of Daniel O'Connell* (Cork: J. O'Brien, 1847). Trant was elected a repeal MP in 1847.
- 64 *Leeds Times*, 21 December 1844.
- 65 *Leeds Times*, 27 December 1845, 31 December 1846.

- 66 *Leeds Times*, 17 February 1846.
- 67 *United Irishman*, 4 March 1848.
- 68 These addresses appeared in the *Northern Star*.
- 69 Letter addressed to O'Higgins, in *Northern Star*, 5 September 1846.
- 70 *Northern Star*, 6 December 1845.
- 71 *Freeman's Journal*, 12 June 1847.
- 72 *Northern Star*, 16 January, 25 April 1846.
- 73 *Northern Star* Portraits: www.ncse.ac.uk/headnotes/nss.html, accessed 20 November 2012.
- 74 *Northern Star*, 2 November 1850.
- 75 Charles Gavan Duffy, *Four Years of Irish History* (London: Cassell, Petter, Galpin, 1883), p. 450.
- 76 Dyott, *Reasons for Seceding*, p. 17.
- 77 *Freeman's Journal*, 8 December 1846.
- 78 Kinealy, 'Brethren in bondage', p. 95.
- 79 Dyott, *Reasons for Seceding*.
- 80 Naoki Sakiyama, 'Dublin merchants and the Irish repeal movement of the 1840s', *Journal of International Economic Studies*, 24 (2010), pp. 31–48.
- 81 John Mitchel, *'An Ulsterman for Ireland': Being Letters to the Protestant Farmers, Labourers, and Artisans of the North of Ireland* (Dublin: The Three Candles, 1917).
- 82 O'Higgins, 'The Irish influence on the Chartist movement', p. 92.
- 83 Mitchel was influenced by James Fintan Lalor; he was also radicalised by the Famine, see Kinealy, *Repeal and Revolution*.
- 84 *United Irishman*, 26 February 1848.
- 85 *United Irishman*, 4 March 1848.
- 86 Kinealy, *Repeal and Revolution*, pp. 158–82.
- 87 *United Irishman*, 4 March 1848.
- 88 *United Irishman*, 18 March 1848.
- 89 *Northern Star*, 25 March 1848; *United Irishman*, 25 March 1848.
- 90 'The Chartist Petition', presented by Messrs. O'Connor and Cripps, 13 April 1848, HC Debates, vol. 98, cc.284–301.
- 91 *Nation*, 15 April 1848.
- 92 *United Irishman*, 29 April 1848.
- 93 Bodleian Library, Lord Clarendon to Lord Grey, Clarendon Papers, 6 April 1848.
- 94 *Nation*, 3 June 1848.
- 95 Hoseki, 'Patrick O'Higgins and Irish Chartism', p. 169.
- 96 'Habeas Corpus Suspension Act (Ireland)', *Hansard*, HC, 8 February 1849, 1849 (97), xlix, 385, p. 381, cc. 875–905.
- 97 *Times*, 28 July 1848.
- 98 *Nenagh Guardian*, 1 August 1848; *Belfast News-Letter*, 1 August 1848.
- 99 For example, *Lancaster Gazette*, 29 July 1848; *Norfolk Chronicle*, 29 July 1848.
- 100 Habeas Corpus, HC, 8 February 1849, p. 381.
- 101 William Smith O'Brien Petition, CRF 1848 O 16/2/051 part 1, sheet 109. The original is in the National Archives, Dublin, but it has been digitised and is available online also.

- 102 *Belfast News-Letter*, 6 February 1849.
- 103 *Belfast News-Letter*, 6 March 1849.
- 104 O'Higgins claimed his ancestors were mentioned in the *Annals*, see 'Poetry', in *Northern Star*, 21 July 1849.
- 105 *Nation*, 17 September 1850. D.G. Boyce, R. Eccleshall and V. Geoghegan (eds), *Political Thought in Ireland Since the Seventeenth Century* (New York: Psychology Press, 2002), argues that this was the first attempt in Ireland to fuse these ideologies, p. 13.
- 106 *Northern Star*, 24 November 1849.
- 107 *Nation*, 17 November 1849.
- 108 *Spectator*, 24 November 1849.
- 109 *Freeman's Journal*, 30 September 1850, 12 March 1851.
- 110 *Northern Star*, 25 January 1851.
- 111 *Northern Star*, 19, 26 April, 13 December 1851.
- 112 *Northern Star*, 13, 20 March 1852.
- 113 The value of his property had remained consistently at £32 throughout the 1840s, but by 1853 had fallen to £28, see *Thom's Directory for 1853*.
- 114 Patrick O'Higgins, *Contrast between the Lord Lieutenant of 1845 and the Lord Lieutenant of 1853* (Dublin: J. M. O'Toole, 1854); *Nation*, 7 January 1854.
- 115 *Freeman's Journal*, 13 October 1854.
- 116 *London Daily News*, 14 October 1854.
- 117 R. J. Duffy, *Historic Graves in Glasnevin Cemetery* (Dublin: James Duffy and Co., 1915).
- 118 *Freeman's Journal*, 4 December 1854.
- 119 *Thom's Directory*, 1856, p. 933. There is no evidence of O'Higgins having married, but according to Copper, there had been a rumour that he had formed an attachment to O'Connor's sister, see Thomas Cooper, *Life of Thomas Cooper* (London: Hodder & Stoughton, 1897), p. 162.
- 120 William J. O'Neill Daunt, *Eighty-Five Years of Irish History, 1800–1885* (Dublin: Ward and Downey, 1888), p. 160.
- 121 Mike Sanders, *The Poetry of Chartism: Aesthetics, Politics, History* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2012), p. 134.
- 122 Quoted in O'Higgins, 'The Irish influence on the Chartist movement', p. 87.
- 123 *Nation*, 22 April 1848.
- 124 *Northern Star*, 10 January 1846.
- 125 John Saville, 1848: *The British State and the Chartist Movement* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1987), p. 202.
- 126 Emmet O'Connor, 'Trade unions and politics, 1830–1945: colonization and mental colonization', in Fintan Lane and Donal Ó Drisceoil (eds), *Politics and the Irish Working Class* (Basingstoke: Palgrave, 2005), p. 29.