

## **British Chartism and the “luminous political example of America”**

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Chartism was the most important popular reform mobilization in nineteenth-century Britain, and Chartists were generally well-disposed towards America. They admired its written constitution and guarantee of personal rights; its republican system and democratic suffrage; its religious toleration and the absence of an established church; its freedom from the weight of tradition, rank, class, and aristocracy; its well-developed local government and sense of active civic participation; its promise of liberty, opportunity, and progress. America seemed to represent what Britain could and should be. It offered Chartists a model and an inspiration. But Chartist attitudes towards America were not straightforward. They were nuanced, certainly self-serving, and in some respects dishonest. In order better to understand why, it is instructive to consider the statements of one of the foremost opinion-formers in Chartism, James Bronterre O’Brien, who made his name in the 1830s as a powerful writer for the unstamped press and was dubbed the Chartist movement’s “schoolmaster,” because he gave it an intellectual basis.

Despite his fame, O’Brien remains an elusive figure. There exists only a small amount of scattered, unpublished personal material, which necessitates reliance on his publications, yet he completed few of his major writing projects, and important shorter pieces from the early part of his career were not revised or expanded later. There is only one modern biography of O’Brien, which appeared in 1971, but most of it was written in the 1920s and 1930s. O’Brien did not write an autobiography—something other Chartist leaders managed to do—or the magnum opus in which his ideology was laid out in a systematic fashion. Contemporary descriptions of O’Brien, meanwhile, are largely unfavorable—when he is mentioned at all, that is. He does not feature prominently in the memoirs of other Chartists, probably because of his estrangement from the mainstream movement after 1841. Though he is often mentioned in the books and articles about Chartism that have been published in recent decades, and his ideas have been usefully surveyed by doctoral students, there is no single,

in-depth study of his life and career and no investigation of the way he thought about and used America in his political activities.<sup>1</sup>

America was important to O'Brien as it was to most British radicals in this era. The American Revolution added to the radical tradition and its vocabulary in the late eighteenth century and was a motive force for campaigners of subsequent generations.<sup>2</sup> America's contribution to Chartism went beyond inspiration and ideas; there were also personnel.<sup>3</sup> Admiration for the U.S. Constitution was reflected in some of the proposals for reform in Britain. Chartist propaganda was filled with American references. The vote as a prerequisite for freedom was a constant theme, and the wide suffrage in America was regarded as a security against tyranny and corruption. Chartists also discussed the British worker and the slave in America in the same breath. The latter had no rights, but British laborers were also the "enslaved many," as an address from the Chartists of Finsbury put it in 1839.<sup>4</sup> At the time of the Bull Ring Riots in Birmingham in 1839, claims were made that the authorities had moved against the Chartists without just cause. Many made a comparison with the Boston Tea Party of 1773 and took up the cry of "No taxation without representation." Washington, Jackson, and other prominent Americans were a staple part of Chartist iconography. Portraits, statuettes, and other symbols could be found in the home as well as on display during meetings and processions.<sup>5</sup> Liverpool Chartist William Jones told a meeting in September 1841 that a spirit of freedom was rising up in Britain, as it had done across the Atlantic at the time of the American Revolution. In both cases it was the life-spring of true patriots.<sup>6</sup> Chartists were deeply interested in events abroad. They sympathized with reformers in Europe, but America held a special fascination (though it was not above criticism). In the United States, political freedom was enshrined in the Constitution and a wide array of rights bulwarked by universal suffrage, a free press, and cheap land, and Chartist periodicals gave support and publicity to working-class organizations in America.<sup>7</sup>

In search of a better life and often in order to escape repression or dodge prison, many Chartists went to America. Some prospered, but others did not, and in more than a few cases America did not live up to expectations. Indeed, there were Chartists whose experiences in the United States undermined their radicalism, or prompted them to return to Britain, or both. But there were also plenty of satisfied emigrants who continued to call themselves

“Chartists” and enjoyed living in a society where they were not treated as inferior or exploited by aristocratic or commercial elites.<sup>8</sup>

America’s political system and social mores influenced Chartists whether or not they went there. For those who did not go, the Chartist press featured so much material about America that they probably felt they knew the place well, a sense that was heightened by the Chartists’ tendency to see in America what they wanted to see. A lot of Chartist material was sent to America, and American publications found their way to Britain, including the National Laborer of Philadelphia and the Working Man’s Advocate of New York City. There was demand for radical literature on each side of the Atlantic, and a conviction that some political, social, and economic problems were international in their nature and incidence. Awareness of developments abroad helped to sustain radical activism in Britain.<sup>9</sup>

Respect for America was high during the Chartist period. The Six Points of the People’s Charter offered a plan for representative democracy: the vote for all adult males, annual elections, the secret ballot, equal electoral districts, the abolition of property qualifications for Members of Parliament, and payment for the latter. The Charter has been described as “essentially a proposal to reorganize British politics along American lines.”<sup>10</sup> Certainly, many Chartists saw America as exemplary: as one of their periodicals put it in 1839, “the inhabitants of the United States are governed on the principles of Chartism, the consequence of which is that all legislation is bent towards the welfare of the many, and not of the few.”<sup>11</sup> In 1845, the Northern Star contrasted virtuous republican government in the United States with corrupt aristocratic rule in Britain, extolling the independence, love of country, sound principle, social equality, economic opportunity, and popular sovereignty it ascribed to the American system.<sup>12</sup> This theme was also pursued by Chartist lecturers.<sup>13</sup>

Chartist opinion about the United States was not uniform, however, and some turned against America because they came to see it as a place of inequality. These disillusioned Chartists concluded that political rights alone could not create real democracy. They lamented the fact that workers in America, as in Britain, had no property and that the benefits of economic development were not fairly distributed. As noted above, many Chartists went to America and were disappointed by what they found there.<sup>14</sup> Nevertheless, admiration for America was a defining characteristic of the Chartist movement. Conditions in Britain were viewed in a way that made everything in America seem better.<sup>15</sup> What is remarkable is not

that some British radicals changed their minds about America, but that resistance to the negative version of America was so strong.<sup>16</sup>

The image of America created by O'Brien, the "schoolmaster" of Chartism, was sympathetic and flattering. If he saw shortcomings, he tended not to dwell on them. Instead, his priority was to preserve the unique status of America as an example and inspiration for British radicalism. Perhaps he feared that if he did not do this, the radicals would lose an essential weapon in their political arsenal. It is likely that, with this in mind, he felt obliged to ignore, minimize, or explain away those aspects of American politics and society that did not fit his purposes.

O'Brien was born in Ireland in 1804. He began training as a lawyer in the 1820s, but on moving to London in 1830 he devoted himself to politics rather than the legal profession, and soon gained notoriety as a forthright champion of the workers' demand for political, social, and economic rights.<sup>17</sup> Effective on the platform but even more so in print, O'Brien made his name writing for the most influential of all plebeian radical publications, the Poor Man's Guardian. He played a prominent role in the campaign against restrictions on the press. He denounced government policies, attacked the middle class, and defended trade unions. He discussed class antagonism, Owenism, the poor laws, and factory conditions, and pushed for the ballot and an extension of the suffrage. O'Brien tried to appeal to the minds as well as the hearts of his readers.<sup>18</sup>

He wrote for several publications in the 1830s and 1840s, but attempts to establish newspapers of his own were not blessed with success. He was often in debt. He could be quarrelsome and difficult, and his popularity declined after the early 1840s, but he retained considerable influence and a sizeable personal following.<sup>19</sup> O'Brien contributed to the broader development of a politicized press shaped by working-class pride and a break from former literary fashions and opinions, and he played an important role in the development of Chartist communication and language.<sup>20</sup> Initially of the "physical force" minority in Chartism, O'Brien moderated his tone (but not his ideas) after he was imprisoned for sedition in 1840-41.<sup>21</sup> He expressed a willingness to cooperate with those middle-class reformers who were prepared to agitate for goals they shared with the Chartists.<sup>22</sup> He added socialist aims to the Six Points, and merged an older rhetoric (targeting political corruption,

aristocratic rule, monopolies, and heavy taxation) with a new paradigm (elucidating class conflict, economic exploitation, the labor theory of value, and capital-versus-labor).<sup>23</sup>

From the outset, O'Brien maintained that moderate reforms were of no use to the vast majority of the British people, and that the key to everything was universal suffrage, which O'Brien expected to result in tangible social improvement: "Universal suffrage means meat and drink and clothing, good hours, and good beds, and good substantial furniture for every man and woman and child who will do a fair day's work."<sup>24</sup> O'Brien believed that reforms should reduce the number and limit the power of non-producers, safeguard for the workers the fruits of their labor, and enable the productive classes to take up a legislative role in order to promote social and moral transformation. This owed something to the ideas of Robert Owen, and O'Brien became interested in efforts to set up Owenite model communities. His newspapers and other publications also gave coverage to the activities (in the United States and elsewhere) of German-born utopian John A. Etzler. At the end of the 1840s O'Brien became closely involved in arrangements to establish a community in Texas.<sup>25</sup> Most of all, though, he greatly admired what he took to be the core democratic and libertarian principles of the French Revolution. One of his heroes was Francois Noel Babeuf, who had been executed in 1797 after leading the "Conspiracy of the Equals," an abortive coup that was designed to reverse the drift towards pragmatic moderation and return the Revolution to a more egalitarian path. Another of his heroes was Maximilian Robespierre.<sup>26</sup>

As his career developed, O'Brien began to focus on one theme in particular: land reform. This was a matter of great concern to most Chartists, and by the mid-1840s O'Brien was writing often and at length about the nationalization of the land, to result in a system of tenancies held from the state. His premise was that the land really belonged to the people, but rather than advocate confiscation he argued that land reform should proceed gradually, with the state purchasing property as it became available. Rents would go into the nation's treasury, which would cover the cost of social improvements. O'Brien also thought of extending public ownership to utilities and related enterprises, applying his arguments about land to the railways, mines, gasworks, canals, and docks.<sup>27</sup> In this way he contributed to broader debates about property rights, the case against the laissez-faire state, and the notion that the interests of workers and consumers had to be promoted through regulation.<sup>28</sup>

These preoccupations are indicative of the things that O'Brien found most interesting about America, and why. As was true of many reformers, America had a special place in O'Brien's thinking. He believed that one of the main causes of the French Revolution was the return from America of French troops who had been exposed to new political ideas. He also thought that Chartism was based on principles that had been established by the American Revolution and clearly enunciated at that time by British radicals. The point was frequently made in O'Brien's publications that most U.S. states had elements of the Charter already in place. Several of his Chartist allies and acquaintances left Britain for the United States, and sent him information from their new homes, and O'Brien himself considered emigration to America at least twice, in 1841 and 1843.<sup>29</sup>

America offered reference points for reformers in Britain, and O'Brien was quick to elucidate examples and lessons. Was America the land of freedom and equality? O'Brien thought so, albeit with a few provisos. He admitted that obstacles to equality were not easy to break down, even in America. He emphasized that all laws had to be directly made or approved by the people, and that popular control over law-making was not guaranteed even in systems—like the American—that had elected assemblies. One of his abiding concerns was to show that political rights, though the priority, would only be a starting point: workers would have to use them to change society. In 1837 O'Brien argued that if America was ahead of Britain, it still had some way to go. Many could vote, but the society as a whole had not yet resolved the problems posed by a flawed system of property holding. There was class struggle in Britain and O'Brien saw it also in America, because there, too, the propertied middle classes blocked democratic reforms.<sup>30</sup>

O'Brien was enthusiastic about land reform proposals in America as well as in Britain, and from the 1830s he commended the communitarian efforts of the aforementioned John A. Etzler (notably in Pennsylvania and Ohio). In 1846 he wrote in support of a group of East Coast reformers in the United States and their creed of agrarian justice, workers' rights, and communal ownership. Late nineteenth-century debates about land reform in the United States were still being influenced by O'Brien's ideas, most notably through figures such as the writer, economist, and politician Henry George, who had read O'Brien's writings and mixed with O'Brienite emigrants to America.<sup>31</sup>

O'Brien wrote about the United States in most of his publications, whether from the 1830s, 1840s, or 1850s. The most sustained comment on and analysis of American affairs came in the Power of the Pence in 1848–49. As was his usual practice, O'Brien dwelt not on the apparent shortcomings of America but on the reasons why it was to be admired and emulated. He rejected the negative comments made by high profile visitors to the United States, minimized the importance of slavery there, and highlighted only the most favorable evidence provided in travel books, correspondence, and other sources. The Power of the Pence never claimed that America was perfect, but it did insist that America proved “the successful results of democratic government in all really essential particulars.”<sup>32</sup>

There are not many disparaging statements about the United States in the Power of the Pence. Those that do appear relate mainly to inequalities of wealth and property; politicians who did not care about the general good; greed and patronage in legislative bodies and in the private companies that provided public services; delay and confusion in the funding of improvement schemes and the disposal of public lands; an unclear division of responsibility on some matters between the individual states and the federal government; inadequate newspaper support for radical reform, despite a free press; under-spending on poor relief, the penal system, and the courts; and tax laws that did not distinguish between productive and unproductive property.<sup>33</sup> But all this pales into insignificance in comparison with the admiring and celebratory remarks that O'Brien published.

He had no doubt that American democracy provided a model for Britain. His premise was unequivocal: “It is the mission of democracy to introduce an entirely new system of society, in which mankind will advance to a state of real, instead of nominal, liberty, equality, and fraternity.” America had taken this path.<sup>34</sup> O'Brien's version of “democracy” rested heavily on egalitarian and communitarian principles, the rights of labor, and a belief in social welfare provisions. Many people in America, he wrote, shared these values and commitments, and some were living them out in settlements that were dotted across the country. But he recognized the strength of an alternative system—one organized around economic competition and private property—unregulated, selfish, excessive, and destructive. In O'Brien's opinion, democracy should mean that the choices open to people should always be on the increase. Through choice, under a popular form of government that emanated from the people, rights would have their correct basis and liberty and property would become

available to everyone. O'Brien wanted it to be clearly understood that "by each person being allowed to work out his own individual interest, the interests of all are woefully sacrificed, as no man can gain his interest beyond a certain point without abstracting from others a share of their just dues." The Americans knew this, which augured well for "a fairer distribution of fortune's favors."<sup>35</sup>

Evidence that America's system of government was more efficient and less expensive than that of Britain was often used by British radicals to highlight the need for reform at home. O'Brien offered many illustrations in his Power of the Pence.<sup>36</sup> He also regularly reminded his readers that events in America had an impact in Britain.<sup>37</sup> Another discussion thread in the Power of the Pence brought together colonialism, land policy, and political institutions, principally with respect to Canada. O'Brien sympathized with Canadian complaints about British rule and compared Canada with the adjacent United States. Canada came off worst regarding access to land, the scope for self-government, and the cost of administration. The crux of the matter, O'Brien thought, was that Canada was plagued by "foolish laws," unlike America, where the people who had to obey the laws played a role in making them.<sup>38</sup>

Remarkably, there was very little in O'Brien's writings on America about slavery. To many Chartists who professed feelings of solidarity with workers in the United States, and admiration for the American political system, slavery was a source of regret. In fact, slavery was a divisive issue in Chartism. While some expressed sympathy for the abolitionist cause in America, and claimed that America's toleration of slavery brought shame upon its people and institutions, others thought that time and energy would be better spent on combating the so-called "wage-slavery" at home. O'Brien was normally to be found in the latter camp. He condemned the leaders of the anti-slavery movement in Britain for ignoring the plight of the laboring poor, the wage-slaves who knew only toil and exploitation. In Britain, O'Brien argued, the employer noticed his "slaves" only when he needed them. In America, a slave master had to support his slaves whether he had work for them or not, and emancipation would enable the master to get more labor at a lower cost. O'Brien referred only infrequently to American slavery in the Power of the Pence. He did hope for its eventual abolition, but he considered slavery in America a relatively unimportant matter and was rarely firm or categorical when attacking it.<sup>39</sup>



In challenging the abolitionists of their own time, O'Brien and other radical spokesmen were dismissing abolitionism as a selective response to labor exploitation. Thomas Haskell warns against taking the arguments of "a few extreme figures" as the norm; but no less important is the remark of Malcolm Chase about an element of racism in Chartism, seen in attitudes towards Jews and Negroes and especially in the equivocation over slavery. Equating the labor system in the American South with the "wage-slavery" in Britain's factories was, Chase thinks, a "clumsy association," and probably reflects ignorance of the real condition of slaves in America.<sup>40</sup>

British admirers of the United States found it difficult to discuss slavery without contradicting their praise for America. This was true of many Chartists. The way individuals regarded slavery in America depended on time, place, and circumstance, and the motives of those who visited and wrote about what they saw in America were varied, as were the levels of anti-slavery conviction.<sup>41</sup> But one phenomenon that can be discerned at this time is the reinforcing of British radicals' wish and ability to prevent slavery from getting in the way of their pro-American eulogies. O'Brien's concept of wage-slavery was one element in a worldview in which all forms of wealth, privilege, and power belonged to the wrong people.<sup>42</sup> Slavery in America did not strike him as being any more evil or inappropriate than wage-slavery in Britain. In fact, one of the premises of his articles on "The Rise, Progress, and Phases of Human Slavery," published in Reynold's Political Register in 1849-50 (and in a single volume, posthumously, in 1885), was that "chattel-slavery, with all its abominations, is less destructive of life, liberty, and happiness than the wages-slavery of modern proletarianism."<sup>43</sup>

Logically, O'Brien should have been disappointed with the United States. He had expected political democracy to put an end to social injustice and economic inequality, but in America, the great testing ground, this had not happened. He preferred to think that it had not happened yet, that it would happen soon, and that America would complete its journey and its mission. As did others, O'Brien saw what he wanted to see in America. It did not matter if his statements about America were true or false. What mattered was that America was a prototype and model, a source of hope, a reason to persevere in agitating for fundamental reform. There were things he disliked about the United States, but he could not draw too

much attention to these because of the risk of weakening the ideological, political, and rhetorical power of America as a tool for British radicals. What other tool could possibly replace it? In December 1848 he hailed the United States as a “luminous political example.”<sup>44</sup> His purpose was to utilize and enhance the “luminous political example” of America, not to jeopardize it.

## Notes

1. Alfred Plummer, Bronterre: A Political Biography of Bronterre O'Brien, 1804-1864 (Toronto, 1971), and idem, "The Place of Bronterre O'Brien in the Working-Class Movement," Economic History Review 2, no.1 (Jan. 1929): 61-80; Lives of Victorian Political Figures II, vol. 4: James Bronterre O'Brien, ed. David Stack (London, 2007), xi-xii, xxi-xxiv, 25-26, 47-48, 61-62, 71, 109, 144-44, 174, 180; Thomas M. Kemnitz, "Recent Work on the Chartist Movement," Newsletter: European Labor and Working Class History 2 (Nov. 1972): 25-27; "A Radical in his Time," Times Literary Supplement, 20 Aug. 1971 (a review of Plummer's Bronterre); Ray Faherty, "Bronterre O'Brien's Correspondence with Thomas Allsop: New Evidence on the Decline of a Chartist Leader," Newsletter: European Labor and Working Class History 8 (Nov. 1975): 28-33; Ben Maw, "Bronterre O'Brien, Class, and the Advent of Democratic Anti-Capitalism," unpub. PhD thesis, University of Swansea, 2005.
2. Gareth Stedman Jones, "The Language of Chartism," in The Chartist Experience: Studies in Working-Class Radicalism and Culture, 1830-1860, ed. James Epstein and Dorothy Thompson (London, 1982), 12-13.
3. One American who was important in early Chartism was Augustus Beaumont, who became active in London politics before founding the Northern Liberator in Newcastle upon Tyne in 1837. Edward Royle, Revolutionary Britannia? Reflections on the Threat of Revolution in Britain, 1789-1848 (Manchester, 2000), 94; Henry Weisser, British Working-Class Movements and Europe, 1815-1848 (Manchester, 1975), 87-88. O'Brien knew Beaumont well and considered him "as noble and kindly a spirit as ever breathed in human form ... Honored be his name, and cherished be his memory for the good he has done!" James Bronterre O'Brien, The Life and Character of Maximilian Robespierre, Proving by Facts and Arguments that that Much Calumniated Person was one of the Greatest Men and one of the Purest and Most Enlightened Reformers that ever Existed in the World (London, 1838), 23. See also British Library, General Reference Collection, 8139.eee.39, "Bronterre's Letters," 1836, nos. 7, 10.
4. J.T. Ward, Chartism (New York, 1973), 141, 247.
5. Malcolm Chase, Chartism: A New History (Manchester, 2007), 1, 82, 143, 268.
6. Chartism: Authentic Report of the Speech of Mr. William Jones upon responding to the Toast of "The People's Charter, and May it soon become the Law of the Land," at a Soirée held in Liverpool on 27 September, 1841, in Celebration of the Release of James Bronterre O'Brien and Feargus O'Connor from their Dungeons (Liverpool, 1841), 15.
7. David Jones, Chartism and the Chartists (London, 1975), 160; Chase, Chartism: A New History, 287.
8. Chase, Chartism: A New History, 92; Ward, Chartism, 135, 236-41; Royle, Revolutionary Britannia? 112; Alex Wilson, "Chartism in Glasgow," and Asa Briggs, "National Bearings," both in Chartist Studies, ed. Asa Briggs (London, 1959), 281, 292; Dorothy Thompson, The Chartists: Popular Politics in the Industrial Revolution (New York, 1984), 160-62, 168, 197, 212, 220; John Charlton, The Chartists: The First National Workers' Movement (London, 1997), 83; Jones, Chartism and the Chartists, 28, 116-17, 167-68, 182, 186.
9. See W. Hamish Fraser, "The Chartist Press in Scotland," Glenn Airey, "Feargus O'Connor, Ernest Jones, and The Liberator," and Edward Royle, "The Cause of the People, the People's Charter Union, and 'Moral Force' Chartism in 1848," all in Papers for the People: A Study of the Chartist Press, ed. Joan Allen and Owen Ashton (London, 2005), 92, 119, 153; and Jones, Chartism and the Chartists, 96, 187.
10. Howard Temperley, Britain and America since Independence (Basingstoke, 2002), 44. Chartism developed, thinks George Lillibridge, "within the framework of the American experience." America was "a blueprint." G.D. Lillibridge, Beacon of Freedom: The Impact of American Democracy upon Great Britain, 1830-1870 (Philadelphia, 1955), 41, 48.
11. Charter, 20 Oct. 1839.
12. Northern Star, 2 Aug. 1845.
13. Denis Paz, "Chartist Lecturers and the Culture of Victorian Lecturing," conference paper, Consortium on the Revolutionary Era, Huntsville, Ala., 2008. I am grateful to Professor Paz for a copy of his paper.
14. Jamie L. Bronstein, "From the Land of Liberty to Land Monopoly: The United States in a Chartist Context," in The Chartist Legacy, ed. Owen Ashton, Robert Fyson, and Stephen Roberts (Rendlesham, 1999), 147-70; Gregory Claeys, "The Example of America as a Warning to England? The Transformation of America in British Radicalism and Socialism, 1790-1850," in Learning and Living: Essays in Honor of J.F.C. Harrison, ed. Malcolm Chase and Ian Dyck (Aldershot, 1996), 66-80; Ray Boston, British Chartists in America, 1839-1900 (Manchester, 1971).
15. Boston, British Chartists in America, 6-7, 14-17.

16. James Epstein, "'America' in the Victorian Cultural Imagination," in Anglo-American Attitudes: From Revolution to Partnership, ed. Frank M. Leventhal and Roland Quinault (Aldershot, 2000), 115–16.
17. Bronterre's National Reformer, 7 Jan. 1837; R.G. Gammage, History of the Chartist Movement, 1837-1854 (New York, 1969), 71-72; Plummer, Bronterre, 15-34; Bernard Canavan, "The Edgeworths of Edgeworthstown: A Rediscovered Heritage," History Workshop Journal 43 (Spring 1997): 240-48; G.D.H. Cole, Chartist Portraits (New York, 1965), 242-43; Miles Taylor, "O'Brien, James [Bronterre O'Brien]," Oxford Dictionary of National Biography (Oxford, 2004), online edition, May 2009 [http://www.oxforddnb.com/view/article/20457, accessed Oct. 15, 2010]; Dorothy Thompson, "Ireland and the Irish in English Radicalism before 1850," in Epstein and Thompson, The Chartist Experience, 129; Peter Brock, "Polish Democrats and English Radicals, 1832-1862: A Chapter in the History of Anglo-Polish Relations," Journal of Modern History 25, no.2 (June 1953): 143; Patricia Hollis, The Pauper Press: A Study in Working-Class Radicalism of the 1830s (Oxford, 1970), 313; Stack, James Bronterre O'Brien, xii–xiv, xxviii, xli, 1–2, 17. From early 1831 O'Brien used "Bronterre" as a nom de plume (brón is Gaelic for "sorrow" or "mourning," and tír means "land" or "country"). Stack suggests that O'Brien combined the Gaelic brón with the French terre because the name "sorrow of the land" was both "a powerful affirmation of his self-perception as a spokesman for the poor and dispossessed" and a signifier of the "amalgamation of Irish and French radicalism" upon which his politics were based.
18. Plummer, Bronterre, 37, 43-45, 48-49, 52-53, 56-57; Chase, Chartism: A New History, 14-16; Stack, James Bronterre O'Brien, xiv–xv, xli, 1–2, 17–18; Cole, Chartist Portraits, 239, 241-43, 246; Thompson, The Chartists, 14, 17, 23, 29, 31-32, 35-36, 42; Asa Briggs, "The Local Background of Chartism," in Briggs, Chartist Studies, 18, and idem, introduction to Cole, Chartist Portraits, xi; Gammage, History of the Chartist Movement, 72-73, 76; Jones, Chartism and the Chartists, 37–38; Ward, Chartism, 54, 64-66, 69-71, 77-78, 150; Charlton, Chartists: First National Workers' Movement, 11, 13; Edward Royle and James Walvin, English Radicals and Reformers, 1760–1848 (Lexington, Ky., 1982), 149.
19. Plummer, Bronterre, 73-76, 84-88, 139-40, 152, 165–67, 176–77; Thomas M. Kemnitz, "Chartist Newspaper Editors," Victorian Periodicals Newsletter 5, no.4 (Dec. 1972): 1–2, 4–5; Wilson, "Chartism in Glasgow," 272; Jones, Chartism and the Chartists, 97, 99–100; Gammage, History of the Chartist Movement, 206; Ward, Chartism, 77-78, 107-8, 144, 150-51; Thompson, The Chartists, 37-38, 42, 49-50, 268-69; Chase, Chartism: A New History, 16, 44, 236, 241, and idem, "Building Identity, Building Circulation: Engraved Portraiture and the Northern Star," in Allen and Ashton, Papers for the People, 25, 35, 37; Hollis, Pauper Press, 108, 291; Stack, James Bronterre O'Brien, xv–xviii, xix, xli–xliv, 18, 61–62, 71–72, 88, 109–10, 131–32, 173–74, 180, 192, 219, 226; Cole, Chartist Portraits, 244, 246, 248-50, 254, 259.
20. Dorothy Thompson, Outsiders: Class, Gender, and Nation (London, 1993), 52-53; Joel H. Wiener, review of Paul T. Murphy, Towards a Working-Class Canon: Literary Criticism in British Working-Class Periodicals, 1816–1858 (Columbus, Ohio, 1994), in Albion 27, no.4 (Winter 1995): 689–90; Paul A. Pickering, "Class without Words: Symbolic Communication in the Chartist Movement," Past and Present 112 (Aug. 1986): 144-46, 152.
21. Ward, Chartism, 77-78, 104-5, 107-8, 113-14, 117, 119, 122-25, 128, 130-31, 137; Hollis, Pauper Press, 124, 131, 133, 135, 148; Plummer, Bronterre, 80-82, 94-97, 99-100, 111-15, 118-22, 129-33, 141-51; Royle, Revolutionary Britannia? 94; Jennifer Bennett, "The London Democratic Association, 1837–1841: A Study in London Radicalism," in Epstein and Thompson, The Chartist Experience, 105–6; Cole, Chartist Portraits, 247-54; Wilson, "Chartism in Glasgow," 262, 269; Thomas M. Kemnitz, "The Chartist Convention of 1839," Albion 10, no.2 (Summer 1978): 152-70; Iorwerth Prothero, "William Benbow and the Concept of the 'General Strike'," Past and Present 63 (May 1974): 134-71; T.M. Parsinnen, "Association, Convention, and Anti-Parliament in British Radical Politics, 1771-1848," English Historical Review 88, no.348 (July 1973): 519-20, 526; Chase, Chartism: A New History, 35, 63, 75-76, 86-87, 161; Gammage, History of the Chartist Movement, 149, 174, 153, 178-79; Thompson, The Chartists, 95; Stack, James Bronterre O'Brien, xvi–xvii, xlii–xliv, 18, 72, 87–88, 109–10.
22. Plummer, Bronterre, 152-55, 159, 162-64, 167–76; Stack, James Bronterre O'Brien, xvi–xviii, xx–xxiv, xxvii, xlv, 110, 121–22, 131–32, 143–44, 173, 226; Gammage, History of the Chartist Movement, 192-94, 203–6; Cole, Chartist Portraits, 255, 257–59; Thompson, The Chartists, 102, 267–69, 272; Ward, Chartism, 144, 150-51, 157, 159, 166; Hollis, Pauper Press, 304-5; Briggs, introduction to Cole, Chartist Portraits, x-xii; Stedman Jones, "The Language of Chartism," 27–28; Prothero, "William Benbow and the Concept of the 'General Strike'," 144-45, 162; Jones, Chartism and the Chartists, 37–38, 73–74, 151; Charlton, Chartists: First National Workers' Movement, 98; Chase, Chartism: A New History, 198, 200, 203, 206-7, 236, 238, 255-56. The best source for O'Brien's position after prison is Mr. O'Brien's Vindication of his Conduct at the Late Birmingham Conference; Containing his "Blackguard Letter" to the Editor of the "Star," which that Personage Suppressed; Also, his Letter to the "British Statesman"; Spirited Defense of Him by Mr. M'Gregor, of Edinburgh; Vincent's Portrait of a Demagogue; Etc., etc. (Birmingham, 1842). See also British Statesman, 15 May, 19 June, 23 July, 6, 13, 27 Aug., 10 Sept., 1, 15 Oct., 5, 12, 26 Nov., 10 Dec. 1842. O'Brien regularly made a distinction (before and after prison) between friendly and unfriendly members of the middle class and aristocracy. Broadly, one's class identity rested on economic function, social status, and political rights, but although the hierarchical structure of society was evil and wrong, individuals within that structure were not necessarily evil and wrong. If most of the middle-class and aristocratic orders were the workers' class enemies, some were not, because they were willing to extend rights and justice to cover the whole people, not just parts of it. See especially "Bronterre's Letters," 1836, no.1; O'Brien, Life and Character of Robespierre, 259–60; British Statesman, 15 May, 25 June, 9 June, 27 Aug. 1842; Poor Man's Guardian and Repealer's Friend, 1843, nos. 1, 11; National Reformer and Manx Weekly Review, 25 May 1847.

23. Thompson, The Chartists, 324; Stack, James Bronterre O'Brien, xvi–xvii, xix–xxi, xxvii, xlv–xlvi, 110, 179–80, 219, 226, 231; Ward, Chartism, 204–6, 220–22; Jones, Chartism and the Chartists, 162, 166; Gammage, History of the Chartist Movement, 301–2, 312; John Belchem, “1848: Feargus O’Connor and the Collapse of the Mass Platform,” in Epstein and Thompson, The Chartist Experience, 281; Royle, “The Cause of the People, the People’s Charter Union, and ‘Moral Force’ Chartism in 1848,” 147–49, 158–59; Henry Weisser, “Chartism in 1848: Reflections on a Non–Revolution,” Albion 13, no.1 (Spring 1981): 22; Parsinnen, “Association, Convention, and Anti–Parliament,” 531; Brian Harrison and Patricia Hollis, “Chartism, Liberalism, and the Life of Robert Lowery,” English Historical Review 82, no.324 (July 1967): 518; Anne Humpherys, “G.W.M. Reynolds: Popular Literature and Popular Politics,” Victorian Periodicals Review 16, no.3/4 (Fall–Winter 1983): 79, 86; Chase, Chartism: A New History, 289, 302, 335–36, 338; Cole, Chartist Portraits, 260–61, 263–65; Plummer, Bronterre, 189–94, 198–207. On international aspects see Margot Finn, “‘A Vent which has Conveyed our Principles’: English Radical Patriotism in the Aftermath of 1848,” Journal of Modern History 64, no.4 (Dec. 1992): 644, 650, 655, 657–59; Gregory Claeys, “Mazzini, Kossuth, and British Radicalism, 1848–1854,” Journal of British Studies 28, no.3 (July 1989): 251–52, 257; Stack, James Bronterre O'Brien, xlv, 180, 220. On the merging of old and new rhetoric see James Epstein, “The Constitutionalist Idiom: Radical Reasoning, Rhetoric, and Action in Early Nineteenth–Century England,” Journal of Social History 23, no.3 (Spring 1990): 557–58, 569; idem, “Radical Dining, Toasting, and Symbolic Expression in Early Nineteenth–Century Lancashire: Rituals of Solidarity,” Albion 20, no.2 (Summer 1988): 287; Jones, Chartism and the Chartists, 37–40, 64, 186–87; Stack, James Bronterre O'Brien, xxix; Royle and Walvin, English Radicals and Reformers, 169–70; Thompson, The Chartists, 105; Hollis, Pauper Press, viii, 100, 203–4, 207, 210, 218–58, 286–90, 293, 299, 302.
24. Operative, 17 March 1839. For a fuller understanding of O’Brien’s opinion on this see “Bronterre’s Letters,” 1836, nos. 1, 5–6, 9; Bronterre’s National Reformer, 11 Feb. 1837; O’Brien, Life and Character of Robespierre, 276–88, 311–12, 352–53; British Statesman, 25 June, 9 July 1842; Poor Man’s Guardian and Repealer’s Friend, 1843, no.8; Power of the Pence, 16 Dec. 1848.
25. On Owenism see Plummer, Bronterre, 31–33, 35, 37, 40–42; Hollis, Pauper Press, 266; Jones, Chartism and the Chartists, 37–38; Ralph Miliband, “The Politics of Robert Owen,” Journal of the History of Ideas 15, no.2 (Apr. 1954): 237; Stack, James Bronterre O'Brien, 2, 122, 144, 174, 219. O’Brien could not understand or accept the Owenite refusal to engage in political activity: e.g. Poor Man’s Guardian, 7 Dec. 1833. See also “Bronterre’s Letters,” 1836, no.7; Bronterre’s National Reformer, 4 Mar. 1837; British Statesman, 5 June 1842; Poor Man’s Guardian and Repealer’s Friend, 1843, nos. 3, 7–8; National Reformer and Manx Weekly Review, 3, 24 Oct., 5, 19, 26 Dec. 1846, 30 Jan., 6 Mar. 1847; Power of the Pence, 27 Jan., 24 Feb., 3 Mar. 1849; Social Reformer, 18 Aug., 1 Sept., 6 Oct. 1849. On Etzler see British Statesman, 23 July 1842; Poor Man’s Guardian and Repealer’s Friend, 1843, nos. 3–7, 13; National Reformer and Manx Weekly Review, 6, 13, 20 Feb., 6, 13, 20, 27 Mar., 3, 10, 17, 24 Apr., 8, 22, 29 May 1847; Gregory Claeys, “John Adolphus Etzler, Technological Utopianism, and British Socialism: The Tropical Emigration Society’s Venezuelan Mission and its Social Context, 1833–1848,” English Historical Review 101, no.399 (Apr. 1986): 357–58, 364; Joel Nydahl’s introduction to The Collected Works of John Adolphus Etzler, 1833–1844 (Delmar, N.Y., 1977); Frank E. Manuel, “Toward a Psychological History of Utopias,” Daedalus 94, no.2 (Spring 1965): 298. The Texas scheme is covered in Social Reformer, 11 Aug., 1, 15 Sept., 6, 13 Oct. 1849; Wilbur S. Shepperson, “Some Plans for British Immigration to Texas in 1849 and 1850,” Southwestern Historical Quarterly 63, no.3 (Jan. 1960): 439–49.
26. James Bronterre O’Brien, Buonarroti’s History of Babeuf’s Conspiracy for Equality: With the Author’s Reflections on the Causes and Character of the French Revolution and his Estimate of the Leading Men and Events of that Epoch: Also his Views of Democratic Government, Community of Property, and Political and Social Equality; Translated from the French and illustrated by Original Notes (London, 1836); idem, Life and Character of Robespierre, 3–11, 12, 15, 17, 21–22, 24, 41–45, 83–96, 217, 219–22, 256–57, 274, 276, 280–82, 303–4, 307–10, 313, 350–53, 468–70, 519–22; idem, An Elegy on the Death of Robespierre. With an Historic Sketch of the Three Assemblies which made the Revolution of 1789. To which is added A Brief Notice of Robespierre’s Public Life (London, 1857), 2, 14–15; idem, A Dissertation and Elegy on the Life and Death of the Immortal Maximilian Robespierre, Revealing for the First Time the Real Causes and Authors of his Death: with True Portraits of the Three Assemblies that Made the Revolution and of their Historic Celebrities; Showing how Completely History has Misrepresented the Originals (London, 1859), 4–5, 7–15, 20–22, 32, 34, 36; “Bronterre’s Letters,” 1836, nos. 2, 5–7, 9; Bronterre’s National Reformer, 11 Mar. 1837; Power of the Pence, 18 Nov., 16 Dec. 1848, 17, 24 Mar., 7 Apr. 1849; Social Reformer, 18 Aug., 1 Sept. 1849. See also French Utopias: An Anthology of Ideal Societies, ed. Frank E. and Fritzie P. Fanuel (New York, 1971): 245–58; Charlton, Chartists: First National Workers’ Movement, 26–27, 56; Plummer, Bronterre, 59–72; Stack, James Bronterre O'Brien, xv, xli–xlii, 179–80; Gammage, History of the Chartist Movement, 73–75; Jones, Chartism and the Chartists, 37; Bennett, “The London Democratic Association,” 112; Cole, Chartist Portraits, 245–46; B.H. Moss, “Republican Socialism and the Making of the Working Class in Britain, France, and the United States: A Critique of Thompsonian Culturalism,” Comparative Studies in Society and History 35, no.2 (Apr. 1993): 408–9; James Epstein and David Karr, “Playing at Revolution: British ‘Jacobin’ Performance,” Journal of Modern History 79, no.3 (Sept. 2007): 501; John R. Dinwiddy, “English Radicals and the French Revolution, 1800–1850,” in The French Revolution and the Creation of Modern Political Culture, Volume 3, The Transformation of Political Culture, 1789–1848, ed. Francois Furet and Mona Onouf (Oxford, 1989), 447–66.
27. Plummer, Bronterre, 179–83; Stedman Jones, “The Language of Chartism,” 32, 34; Cole, Chartist Portraits, 256–57. O’Brien’s cooperation in the mid–1830s with utopian Tory James Bernard, owner (briefly) of the London Mercury when O’Brien was its editor, foundered in part on a disagreement about landowners and farmers: Bernard thought of them as potential allies of the working class, but O’Brien denied that the interests of property could be merged with those of labor. See Gregory Claeys, “A

Utopian Tory Revolutionary at Cambridge: The Political Ideas and Schemes of James Bernard, 1834–1839,” Historical Journal 25, no.3 (Sept. 1982): 583–603; Stack, James Bronterre O’Brien, xvi, xlii, 61, 72. R. Eldon Berry, Nationalization in British Politics: The Historical Background (Stanford, Calif., 1965), credits O’Brien as one of the principal nineteenth-century advocates of the people’s “resumption” of ownership of the land and points out, with regret, that although some of the resources and utilities that were discussed in this period were eventually, in the mid-twentieth century, subjected to a form of nationalization in Britain, land was the major exception. T.M. Parsinnen, “Thomas Spence and the Origins of English Land Nationalization,” Journal of the History of Ideas 34, no.1 (Jan.-Mar. 1973): 135-41, mentions O’Brien as one of the advocates of land nationalization who connected the political platforms of the 1920s and 1930s with those of the late eighteenth century. There is a link here with rapidly evolving ideas about liberty, sovereignty, and natural rights. See Richard Ashcraft, “Liberal Political Theory and Working Class Radicalism in Nineteenth-Century England,” Political Theory 21, no.2 (May 1993): 249–72. For some of O’Brien’s clearest statements on the land question, see “Bronterre’s Letters,” 1836, nos. 1, 7; Bronterre’s National Reformer, 7, 28 Jan., 25 Feb., 18 Mar. 1837; O’Brien, Life and Character of Robespierre, 13–14, 280, 303–6, 313, 519–21; British Statesman, 6 Aug. 1842; Poor Man’s Guardian and Repealer’s Friend, 1843, nos. 1, 3–8, 10–11, 13; National Reformer and Manx Weekly Review, 3, 10, 17, 24 Oct., 14, 21 Nov., 5, 19 Dec. 1846, 2, 9, 16, 23 Jan., 6, 13, 20 Feb., 6, 27 Mar., 3, 10, 17 Apr., 1, 8, 15 May 1847; Power of the Pence, 23, 30 Dec. 1848, 6, 20, 27 Jan., 3, 10 Feb., 3, 24 Mar., 14 Apr. 1849; Social Reformer, 25 Aug., 1, 22 Sept., 6, 13, 20 Oct. 1849; O’Brien, Dissertation and Elegy on the Life and Death of Robespierre, 4–5, 21–22. On the Chartist Land Plan, which O’Brien opposed, see Plummer, Bronterre, 180, 185–89; Stack, James Bronterre O’Brien, xviii, 144; Joy MacAskill, “The Chartist Land Plan,” in Briggs, Chartist Studies, 305, 307, 315, 340; Ward, Chartism, 170, 180; Gammage, History of the Chartist Movement, 267-69, 272-74; Cole, Chartist Portraits, 259-60; Jones, Chartism and the Chartists, 131; Stedman Jones, “The Language of Chartism,” 43. Malcolm Chase, “‘Wholesome Object Lessons’: The Chartist Land Plan in Retrospect,” English Historical Review 118, no.475 (Feb. 2003): 59-85, shows that political and economic change after the 1840s made the ideas behind the Land Plan unfashionable. The Land Plan is defended in Thompson, The Chartists, 305-6, and in W.H.G. Armytage, “The Chartist Land Colonies, 1846-1848,” Agricultural History 32, no.2 (Apr. 1958): 87-96. On the significance of the Land Plan see also Angus Macintyre’s insightful review of Alice M. Hadfield, The Chartist Land Company (Newton Abbot, 1970), in Economic History Review 24, no.2 (May 1971): 301–2. For examples of O’Brien’s attacks on the Chartist Land Plan, see Poor Man’s Guardian and Repealer’s Friend, 1843, nos. 7–8; National Reformer and Manx Weekly Review, 17, 24 Oct., 19 Dec. 1846, 9 Jan., 17 Apr., 1, 15, 22 May 1847; Power of the Pence, 31 Mar. 1849; Social Reformer, 25 Aug. 1849.

28. Thomas A. Horne, Property Rights and Poverty: Political Argument in Britain, 1605–1834 (Chapel Hill, N.C., 1990); Noel Thompson, The Market and its Critics: Socialist Political Economy in Nineteenth Century Britain (New York, 1988); Frank F. Rosenblatt, The Chartist Movement in its Social and Economic Aspects (London, 1967); and Peter J. Gurney, “‘Rejoicing in Potatoes’: The Politics of Consumption in England during the ‘Hungry Forties,’” Past and Present 203 (May 2009): 101-2, 136.

29. O’Brien, Life and Character of Robespierre, 129; British Statesman, 16 July, 5 Nov. 1842; National Reformer and Manx Weekly Review, 26 Dec. 1846; Power of the Pence, 11 Nov. 1848, 7, 14 Apr. 1849; Plummer, Bronterre, 29, 69, 77-78, 124, 148, 164–65; Poor Man’s Guardian and Repealer’s Friend, 1843, no.13.

30. O’Brien, Buonarroti’s History of Babeuf’s Conspiracy, 213–15; London Mercury, 7 May 1837; Hollis, Pauper Press, 280.

31. O’Brien, Buonarroti’s History of Babeuf’s Conspiracy, 219; British Statesman, 23 July 1842; Poor Man’s Guardian and Repealer’s Friend, 1843, nos. 3, 5–6; National Reformer and Manx Weekly Review, 21 Nov. 1846; Malcolm Chase, “From Millennium to Anniversary: The Concept of Jubilee in Late Eighteenth- and Nineteenth-Century England,” Past and Present 129 (Nov. 1990): 132-47; Claude E. Reeves, “Henry George’s Speaking in the Land Reform Movements: The West Coast ‘Training Phase,’” American Journal of Economics and Sociology 24, no.1 (Jan. 1965): 54.

32. Power of the Pence, 17 Feb. 1849.

33. Power of the Pence, 11, 25 Nov., 30 Dec. 1848, 6 Jan., 24, 31 Mar. 1849.

34. Power of the Pence, 16, 23 Dec. 1848, 17, 24 Feb., 14 Apr. 1849.

35. Power of the Pence, 3 Mar. 1849.

36. Power of the Pence, 2, 16, 23, 30 Dec. 1848, 6 Jan., 3, 10, 17 Feb., 24, 31 Mar., 7, 14 Apr. 1849.

37. E.g. Power of the Pence, 24 Feb., 3, 10 Mar. 1849.

38. Power of the Pence, 10 Feb., 3 Mar. 1849.

39. Power of the Pence, 16, 30 Dec. 1848, 17 Feb., 14 Apr. 1849; Royle, “The Cause of the People, the People’s Charter Union, and ‘Moral Force’ Chartism in 1848,” 162; Royden Harrison, “British Labor and American Slavery,” Science and Society 25, no.4 (Dec. 1961): 310. Anti-slavery groups in Britain and America did not always agree with each other: e.g. Royle and Walvin, English Radicals and Reformers, 186.

40. Thomas L. Haskell, "Capitalism and the Origins of the Humanitarian Sensibility," American Historical Review 90, no.2 (Apr. 1985): 350; Chase, Chartism: A New History, 306–7.
41. Thomas K. Murphy, A Land without Castles: The Changing Image of America in Europe, 1780–1830 (Lanham, Md., 2001), 210–11.
42. E.g. Power of the Pence, 3 Mar. 1849.
43. See James Bronterre O'Brien, "The Rise, Progress, and Phases of Human Slavery: How it Came into the World, and How it Shall be Made to Go Out," reprinted in The Chartist Movement in Britain, 1838–1850, ed. Gregory Claeys (6 vols., London, 2001), 6: 299-442. Slavery in the United States is discussed mainly in parts 7 and 8; the quotation is from p. 357 in the Claeys edition.
44. Power of the Pence, 16 Dec. 1848.