

PILLS, PAMPHLETS AND POLITICS: THE CAREER OF PETER MURRAY MCDOUALL (1814–54)

P. Pickering and S. Roberts

In 1975 David Jones suggested that the “little doctor”, Peter Murray McDouall, “deserves a biography”. It is easy to understand why. During a public career that lasted about fifteen years, this Lancashire based Chartist was never far from the headlines; he was arrested numerous times, spent three years in prison and two years in self-imposed exile in France. In 1841 he topped the poll in the inaugural election for the executive of the National Charter Association (NCA) — a feat he repeated in 1842 — and he was triumphantly re-elected in the midst of the crisis of 1848.¹ Despite his prominence McDouall has not attracted much attention from historians; he has not even received an entry in one of the nine volumes of the *Dictionary of Labour Biography* published to date.² The article that follows is designed to fill this gap. McDouall’s standing alone is sufficient reason to write about him but, as a man who exchanged the relatively comfortable life of a medical practitioner for the uncertainty of the “trade of agitation”, he is also a good case study of those members of the “uneasy classes” who served the Chartist movement in significant numbers.³ In terms of E.P. Thompson’s well-known

statement that “the middle-class Radical and the idealist intellectual were forced to take sides between the ‘two nations’”, McDouall made his choice; an exploration of his reasons for doing so sheds important light on the social polarisation of early Victorian Britain.⁴

Background

Peter McDouall was born in 1814 in Newton-Stewart, a market town on the river Cree about eighty miles from Glasgow in the south-west of Scotland. During the years that he was growing up among its 2000 or so inhabitants, Newton-Stewart was undergoing an abortive attempt at industrialisation. The failure of ventures in cotton spinning and coarse carpet manufacture dashed expectations of rapid expansion; and, as McDouall later commented, occurred at the same time as a sharp decline in the condition of the local hand loom weavers.⁵ A *Scottish Gazetteer* noted that Newton-Stewart was a centre for two Presbyterian secessionist groups — the Relief and the Cameronians. Growing up in an atmosphere pervaded by religious dissent may well have been the catalyst that, as in so many other cases, led on to radical causes.⁶ Addressing Chartist crowds,

McDouall was an astringent critic of the “rotten and slimy slough of Churchism”, but not of “true religion”: “he honoured and revered Christianity and the Bible”. He shared a sense of public duty with many religious radicals: “It is the duty of a good man”, he wrote, “to leave the world better than he found it”. This predisposition to public life may have also owed something to a family radical tradition — he was, he told an audience in Edinburgh, the grandson of a man who fought alongside Washington.⁷

McDouall’s father, Andrew, was a poet, known locally as “Will Wander”. He brought out *Will Wander of Benarrow’s Trip to America and Other Poems*; his son was also able to write verse.⁸ From a middle-class background, the young McDouall embarked on a medical education, studying with a surgeon in Newton-Stewart and in Glasgow and Edinburgh. We know what was involved from the experience of another Scot, Samuel Smiles, who did a medical apprenticeship at this time. Smiles learned to mix potions, to bleed and to bandage, and he assisted in “attending the poorer class of patients”. A couple of years into his apprenticeship Smiles began sitting in on classes at Edinburgh University and after six years he applied for his diploma. Following an oral examination of about an hour he commenced his career as a doctor. McDouall passed a similar examination at the Royal Edinburgh College of Surgeons in the mid-1830s before relocating to Lancashire.⁹



Peter McDouall.

The Charter, April 1839

Ramsbottom and Hyde: The Condition of the People

McDouall lived briefly in Burnley, managing a medical practice there, before moving, in 1835, to Ramsbottom, on the outskirts of Bury, where he established a successful practice among the residents of a cluster of small factory towns in the Irwell valley. In the three decades before McDouall's arrival, Ramsbottom had been transformed from a typical eighteenth-century village comprising a handful of cottages into a booming industrial township with about 2,000 inhabitants. The architects of this transformation were members of the nascent Lancashire industrial élite: the Grants and the Ashtons.¹⁰ The spectacular rise of the Grants attracted the attention of Samuel Smiles, who re-told their story in *Self Help*. They arrived in Ramsbottom in 1783 penniless and began work at a small dyeing establishment, but went on to build a cotton spinning and dyeing empire in the Irwell valley. William Grant's rise was also marked by the acquisition of political and social power commensurate with his wealth; he became a magistrate and deputy-lieutenant of the county.¹¹ Early in the nineteenth century the Ashtons established a large cotton mill at Ramsbottom (they also owned extensive factories at Middleton and Hyde). Engels found Thomas Ashton to be a typical "Liberal manufacturer" who gave guided tours of his "superb, admirably arranged building"; "he calls your attention to the lofty, airy rooms, the fine machinery, here and there a healthy-looking operative". But, Engels continued, all was not as it appeared: "the people hate the manufacturer, this they do not point out to you, because he is present"; the factory school trained children to subordination" and employees who read "Chartist or Socialist papers and books" were dismissed.¹² The air at Ramsbottom was thick with radicalism. The town had sent a contingent to Peterloo and in 1826 there had been a pitched battle at Ashton's mill over the introduction of power looms (William Grant had read the Riot Act). Engels pointed out that the Ashtons were given further reason to hate radicals five years later in 1831 when Samuel's son was shot and killed in Hyde during an industrial dispute.¹³

McDouall's experience as a practicing doctor in this setting was crucial to his politicisation and resulted in him becoming a vehement opponent of the factory system. At a time when the statistical inquiry was coming of age as a tool of social investigation, McDouall undertook a detailed survey of his adopted home, visiting over 300 cottages occupied by factory labourers and their families. What he found shocked and appalled him; the conditions were "miserable in the extreme". The cottages were severely over-crowded and sparsely furnished; weekly wages were low — five shillings on an average — leading to hunger and debt; infant mortality was high — "of 10,000 children, not half of that number survive five years"; and illiteracy was widespread. The conclusion was inescapable: "rags, starvation and death were the fate of these unfortunate people".¹⁴ McDouall first publicised his research in a presentation to a meeting of the British Association at Newcastle-upon-Tyne in August 1838 which later appeared in the *Journal of the Statistical Society*. Finding that the British Association were more interested in a paper that concluded that employees of Thomas Ashton enjoyed the best pay and conditions in England, McDouall extended his investigations to Hyde.¹⁵

Here he discovered, much as Engels did a few years later, that all was not as it seemed. The occupants of one house received 17s each week from Ashton's Mill, but from this sum "they paid Mr. Thomas Ashton 5s 5d for coals, rent

and water, not forgetting 2d for the [factory] Sunday School, leaving a sum of 11s 7d for nine persons to live on during the week". There were many similar cases of people receiving "nominal payments subject to deductions by the masters".¹⁶ As McDouall testified before a Select Committee on the payment of wages in 1842, the district where he practiced was rife with this oppressive "truck system" whereby employees were paid in kind or compelled to patronise shops and rent houses owned by their employer, often at exorbitant prices. Smiles was wrong when he stated that the Grant brothers were "honoured and respected by all who knew them"; McDouall accused them of engaging in truck. The working people, "Consider themselves robbed in a variety of ways", he told the Committee; they were "afraid" to bring action under existing legislation as "a great majority of the magistrates are factory masters" — an unmistakable reference to William Grant.¹⁷

"White Slavery"

McDouall's critique of the system did not end here. As a doctor he was in a good position to comment on the impact of factory labour on the health of the population: "we find repeated diseases of the structure amongst the adults; diseased lungs, diseased livers, and diseased stomachs." In addition accidents were common, particularly involving children. Factories were, he concluded, "hospitals of disease" where "death presented itself under a hundred different forms".¹⁸ For McDouall the victims of the factory system were not only those confined to the "hospitals of disease", but also those whose labour had been devalued by the machine. He had witnessed the distress of the hand loom weavers in his home town and in the Irwell valley he now saw a "once noble race . . . in rags and want".¹⁹ "Oh! for the days of the rattling loom", he wrote in a poem published in 1849:

*In the days of my father I lived by the loom,
My song with my shuttle kept pace,
I knew not starvation nor poverty's gloom,
Strong was my arm and ruddy my face.*²⁰

For McDouall the solution to these problems was political: "I believe the only law which the people believe would be effectual, is a law which the people should have a voice in making".²¹ Although it is too simplistic to reduce Chartism to a "knife and fork" question involving the revolt of displaced outworkers, economic issues were crucial for Peter McDouall. The " manifold evils of the factory system" formed the basis of his first major address to the Chartist National Convention of 1839, and, subsequently, "White Slavery" was the most common subject matter of his many lectures, articles and poems as an active Chartist. Political reform was not about abstract philosophical concepts, it was about practical solutions; as he bluntly told a group of M.P.s in 1842, he believed that: "if the people in the manufacturing districts had had their social miseries remedied by the law in former times, they would never have sought for political remedies now".²²

McDouall's opposition to the factory system earned him powerful enemies. He came to appreciate the vulnerability of the "White Slaves" first hand when he found that his patients were being instructed not to attend him by their employers and that he was prevented from attending cases at local factories. At his first trial in August 1839 he drew attention to the fact that the principal Crown witness against him was Thomas Ashton's brother-in-law.²³ Opposition to the factory system was thus at the core of McDouall's political radicalism in more ways than one.

Chartism

The immediate cause of McDouall's involvement in Chartism was his friendship with Dr Matthew Fletcher, a surgeon in nearby Bury. Though McDouall had made a name for himself in a debating society in Castle Douglas, not far from his home town, he was very nervous when, in October 1838, Fletcher introduced him at a public meeting. A fellow Chartist, R.G. Gammage, recorded that those who heard him "held little hope of his success in that department". Yet in time McDouall became a skilled orator.²⁴ His rise through the Chartist ranks was rapid. The arrest of the enigmatic Tory-radical preacher, J.R. Stephens, in December 1838, created a vacancy at the Convention, then in permanent session in London. Stephens recommended McDouall to his Ashton constituents, who duly elected the "little doctor" in January 1839. At the Convention McDouall quickly earned a reputation for extremist views on the right of the people to bear arms, and he urged the delegates to adopt a plan of "ulterior measures", including a national strike. "He did not come to the Convention merely to present a petition", he declared, "if they were not to recommend ulterior measures he had better go home". "If such views caused alarm", he continued, it should be understood that they "sprung from the feelings of a benevolent heart".²⁵ There is evidence to suggest that McDouall was also involved in clandestine arrangements for an armed uprising in the spring of 1839. According to a military veteran and Anti-Corn Law League stalwart, Alexander Somerville, McDouall was part of a secret insurrectionary committee and saw himself as a potential commander-in-chief of Chartist forces.²⁶ In May he was implicated in the purchase of muskets and bayonets in Birmingham, where the Convention had reconvened. During the Bull-Ring riots that gripped Birmingham in mid-July 1839, however, McDouall had urged rioters to throw down their weapons.²⁷

As early as April 1839 McDouall had come to the attention of the Home Office as one of the most violent of the



Rev Joseph Rayner Stephens — McDouall's mentor.

R.G. Gammage, *History of the Chartist Movement*, London 1969, p.56

Chartists and in June 1839 he was arrested.²⁸ At his trial in August McDouall spoke for over four hours justifying his actions on the basis of Britain's "ancient constitution" and detailing the condition of the manufacturing districts "to which he attributed the agitation commenced by [the working classes] for the increase of their political power." According to William Aitken, an Ashton-under-Lyne Chartist, who sat in the crowded courtroom gallery, McDouall defended himself "with a firmness and an eloquence which even his enemies could not but admire. There was no shrinking before that high tribunal from the principles he had advocated." In a public house the following day, another Chartist, Thomas Dunning, found the special constables ordering in jugs of ale and drinking the health of Dr McDouall whose speech had converted them to Chartism". The speech did not, however, have the desired effect on the jury who convicted McDouall of using seditious language without even bothering to retire and he was sentenced to twelve months imprisonment at Chester Castle.²⁹

McDouall's life in prison was notable for an acrimonious dispute with his former mentor and fellow inmate, J.R. Stephens, and a love affair with a "turnkey's" daughter whom he married upon his release.³⁰ Gammage remembered that McDouall was of "an ardent fiery temperament" and his feud with Stephens, which involved allegations of misappropriation of funds and sexual impropriety, was the first of many spectacular clashes that marked McDouall's public career.³¹

When he emerged from prison in August 1840 it was into the "trade of agitation". This existence was not, however, a comfortable one. McDouall "sacrificed a lucrative profession" (the words are Gammage's) for the cause, and, without payment during his time at the Chartist Convention, used up "a good round sum in the Bury Bank".³² Like many other Chartists who took tentative steps into the world of professional politics (often following a brush with the law), he lived by a combination of lecturing, journalism, and



Matthew Fletcher.

The Charter, March 1839

pamphleteering, including editing his own Chartist newspaper between April and October 1841. He retained a tenuous link with his former profession by supplementing his income with the proceeds of a concoction called "McDouall's Florida Medicine" which he peddled to Chartist audiences in 1842.³³

The market for his pills and pamphlets reflected the following that he had built up during his lecture tours. Beginning within days of his release from Chester Castle on 13 August 1840, McDouall was feted at a succession of "liberation" parades and soirees. It was a punishing programme. In the five weeks between his release and 21 September, when he arrived in Glasgow, he had addressed twenty-seven meetings throughout Lancashire, Yorkshire and into Scotland. Although his health had begun to fail he continued to meet his commitments: Edinburgh (24th), Dalkeith (25th), Bathgate (28th), Airdrie (29th), Hamilton (30th), Strathaven (1st), Newmills (2nd), Cummnock (5th), Kilmarnock (6th), Saltcoats (7th), Paisley (8th), Johnston (9th), Kilbarchan (10th), Eagelsham (12th), Kirkintilloch (14th) and Campsie (15th).³⁴ And on it went. With understandable exaggeration he claimed in July 1841 that since his release he had spoken to nearly 5,000,000 Britons from the Isle of Wight to Aberdeen.³⁵

On the platform McDouall cut an impressive figure. Gammage wrote:

McDouall was rather short, but possessed a straight and well-erected frame; in personal appearance he was decidedly handsome; his general features were extremely prepossessing; his mouth was small but well formed, void of any unpleasant compression of the lips, his face rather inclined to the oval; his eyes were full, and in



Dr. McDouall.

Gammage, p.156

*moments of excitement sparkling and fiery; his brow was moderately high, very full and broad, and his eyebrows dark and finely pencilled; his hair was light, approaching to sandy (although a government description once stated it to be black), was parted in the centre and hung in long graceful curls behind his ears, and his whole appearance was highly interesting.*³⁶

McDouall supplemented his natural good looks by wearing black clothes and long cape which gave him, in the words of another Chartist, "the appearance of a hero of melodrama."³⁷ The tone of his message had not changed, but the emphasis had. "The first great error was the physical force idea", he told the Manchester Chartists; "if you want to defeat your oppressors then...ORGANISE, ORGANISE."³⁸ His preoccupation with the organisational requirements of the movement was reflected in his editorial contributions to his *Chartist and Republican Journal*. In April 1841 he outlined a comprehensive plan to amend the NCA structure which had been adopted the previous July. He envisaged an organisation that combined the virtues of centralisation — a national executive, national delegates' conferences and so on — and intimacy, in the form of small trade-based Chartist Associations in which, "Every man will know his neighbour". It is questionable whether McDouall's model would have been any more successful than the NCA in evading the legal obstacles that confronted a national organisation, and his call for the trades to form political associations was a process that was already well under way.³⁹

Although McDouall's plan was not adopted, his standing was not diminished. Later in 1841 he put it to the test in two important electoral contests. In June he topped the poll in the election for the National Executive of the NCA, gaining 3,795 votes.⁴⁰ A month later he stood before the electors of Northampton as Chartist candidate in the General Election. His campaign was based on the demands for political reform contained in the People's Charter as well as opposition to the New Poor Law and the Rural Police. He also approved of the "unfettering of commerce in every respect" — a reference to the repeal of the Corn Laws — provided that the people were given the protection of universal suffrage. He won, he claimed, "the largest show of hands ever given to any...candidate"; at the poll he received 170 votes (compared to 990 and 970 for the two Whigs and 896 for the Tory). McDouall took credit for reducing the Whig vote by 120 based on the result of the previous election — "they have got a rub they will not forget for some time" — but he probably succeeded in ensuring the defeat of the Tory.⁴¹ Not that he cared for either of the major parties. Although he sought to damage the Whigs in Northampton, in August 1842, he used his fists on the Tories in a wild brawl at Nottingham in the course of providing unsolicited help to the by-election campaign of the Quaker radical philanthropist and corn magnate, Joseph Sturge.⁴²

McDouall's activities in 1840–2 proved to be an *entre'acte* between brushes with the law. His role on the NCA executive put him at the centre of the massive wave of strikes that swept through Lancashire, Cheshire and the Potteries in August 1842. As the industrial action entered its second week McDouall arrived in Manchester to represent the London Chartists at a routine national conference.⁴³ The Chartist deliberations took place a stone's throw from the headquarters of the striking trades who had resolved not to return to work until the Charter was enacted. McDouall

penned an address from the NCA executive "to the people" that unambiguously supported the adoption of a political objective for the strike:

... we have solemnly sworn, and one and all declared, that the golden opportunity now within our grasp shall not pass away fruitless, that the chance of centuries, afforded to us by a wise and all-seeing God, shall not be lost; but that we do now universally resolve never to resume labour until labour's grievances are destroyed, and protection secured for ourselves, our suffering wives, and helpless children, by the enactment of the People's Charter.⁴⁴

On the question of whether violence would be needed to resolve the issue, however, the language of the placard was considerably more ambiguous:

ENGLISHMEN! the blood of your brothers reddens the streets of Preston and Blackburn, and the murderers thirst for more. Be firm, be courageous, be men. Peace, Law and Order have prevailed on our side — let them be revered until your brethren in Scotland, Wales, and Ireland, are informed of your resolution; and when a universal holiday prevails, which will be the case in eight days, then of what use will bayonets be against public opinion?

£100 REWARD.

Whereas,

A WARRANT has been issued for the APPREHENSION of PETER MURRAY Mc DOUALL, late of Ramsbottom, near Bury, Surgeon; he is better known by the name of

**DR. Mc DOUALL,
CHARTIST LECTURER.**

DESCRIPTION.

He is about 27 years of age, stands about 5 ft. 6 in. high, inclined to be stout, has long dark hair, swarthy complexion, with high cheek bones, sharp black eyes, whiskers rather lighter than his hair; generally dresses in black; speaks quick, with a Scotch accent.

The above Reward will be paid by the Government to any Person who shall give such Information as will lead to the Apprehension of the said Peter Murray Mc Douall.

Information to be given to Sir CHARLES SHAW, Chief Commissioner of the Manchester Police.

**TOWN HALL, MANCHESTER,
September 3rd, 1842.**

SIMPSON AND GILLET, PRINTERS, MARKET STREET, MANCHESTER

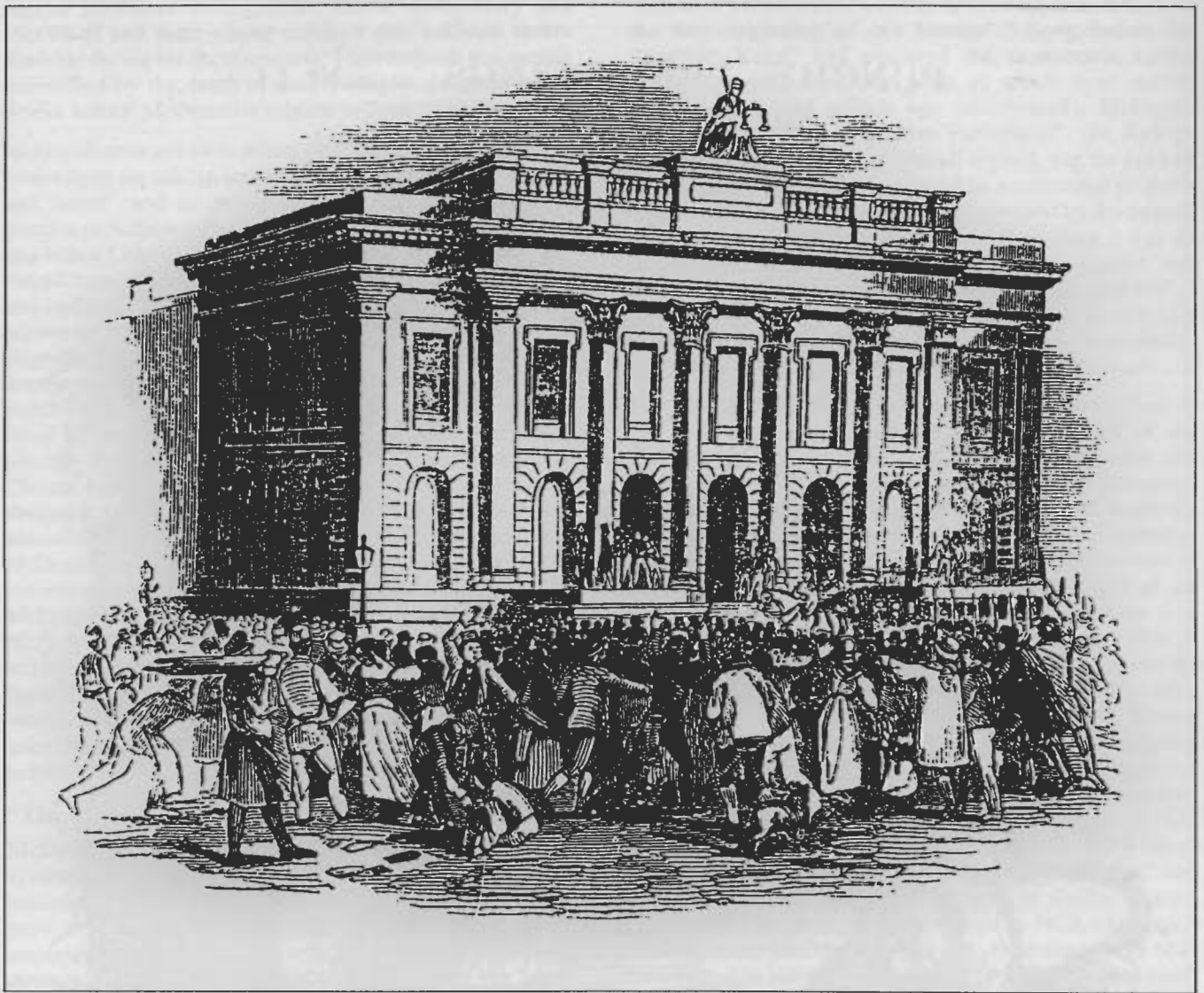
Offer of reward for Peter McDouall

McDouall in fact had little choice in taking this stand. "The question of having or not having a strike was already decided, because the strike had taken place", he later wrote, "the question of making or not making that strike political was also decided, because the trades had resolved, almost unanimously, to cease labour for the charter alone." The only question unresolved was "whether chartism should or should not retain its ascendancy in its natural territory".⁴⁵ His decision to offer leadership to the struggle was costly. The authorities seized on the placard as the pretext for issuing the first of several warrants and McDouall was lucky to evade capture. Gammage recounts several anecdotes of McDouall's daring life as fugitive, before he successfully escaped to France in September 1842.⁴⁶ He was not the only Chartist who took this option in 1842; his friend, William Aitken, took a ship to the United States.

While he was avoiding the police, McDouall was attacked by the editor of the *Northern Star*, William Hill, over the expenses incurred by the NCA Executive. On top of this, his absence made him a convenient scapegoat for the actions of the Chartist leadership during the strikes.⁴⁷ From his self-imposed exile he penned intermittent justifications of his fiscal and political conduct; he was soon also actively engaged in local politics, contributing articles to Etienne Cabet's communist journal, *Le Populaire*.⁴⁸ McDouall had probably met Cabet in London in 1839 at the end of the

Dijon lawyer's long exile in Britain.⁴⁹ In Paris their relationship seem to have blossomed. McDouall set about translating ("at the especial request of the author") Cabet's ponderous and stilted utopian novel, *Voyage en Icarie*, which was ready for publication in May 1845.⁵⁰

Little other information about McDouall's activities in France has come to light, although it is clear from his occasional public letters that he suffered considerable hardship on the Continent (as did his family who had been left behind) in spite of receiving assistance from collections taken at several Chartist localities and £50 from Feargus O'Connor.⁵¹ By the end of 1844 it was clear that McDouall's fellow conspirators, although convicted, were not going to be called for sentence, and he judged it safe to return. He stepped off the boat into controversy. McDouall's first action was an attempt to reorganise Chartism in Scotland together with a plan to commence a Chartist newspaper based in Glasgow. When it became clear that he envisaged a Scottish organisation separate from the NCA, he found himself in direct conflict with O'Connor. He also quarrelled with a former close friend and colleague on the NCA executive, James Leach, over the administration of a fund that had been collected during his exile for the ostensible purpose of assisting McDouall to establish a medical practice in Manchester. Not content with this, McDouall renewed his public dispute with William Hill, and levelled allegations of spying at two of his long-standing Manchester comrades, James Wheeler and Abel Heywood.⁵²



Reading the Riot Act, Manchester Town Hall, 1842.

Illustrated London News, 1842, p.232

Early in 1847 McDouall took steps to set up a medical practice at Oldham, but as soon as the formation of the Chartist Land Company sparked a demand for lecturers, he answered the call, establishing himself as a prominent promoter of the Land Plan.⁵³ Much to his great satisfaction, he came into conflict with the authorities in the Potteries. After the police tried to break up his meeting in Newcastle-under-Lyme, he confronted the local magistrates; and in Burslem he was “escorted by a posse of policemen out of the town”.⁵⁴ McDouall’s enthusiasm for rural resettlement was a corollary of his passionate opposition to the factory system. The Land Plan offered the victims of “White Slavery” nothing less than “social redemption”; it was, McDouall argued, “not only practically, but scientifically correct”, a point he illustrated with experiments in agricultural chemistry during his lectures.⁵⁵

McDouall spent the early months of 1848 on a lecture tour in Scotland, “although, God knows, I should be at my profession. I have sacrificed much valuable time and feel keenly the frequent and long separation from my family”.⁵⁶ His return to prominence was capped in the spring of 1848 with his re-election to the executive of the NCA.⁵⁷ In the aftermath of 10 April, the day the Chartists sought to present their last petition to Parliament, and the subsequent proscription of Chartist meetings, McDouall again became embroiled in conspiracy, chairing a secret insurrectionary committee in

London.⁵⁸ It was a speech at Ashton-under-Lyne, however, that led to his arrest in the middle of the night of 16 July. At his trial for sedition and illegal assembly in August 1848 he was defended by the well known radical lawyer, W.P. Roberts, but the result was no different than 1839; McDouall was convicted and sentenced to two years imprisonment at Kirkdale. “It is not for myself that I care about”, he told Roberts, “but what are the children to do?”⁵⁹

At Kirkdale McDouall was subjected to the worst of a prison system designed for “grinding men good”.⁶⁰ Conditions there were poor. A fellow Chartist inmate, John West, described the cells:

*[they] are lofty with arched roofs, and a small aperture to admit air over the door, and an iron-girded window in front. There is no glass in this window, but wooden slides inside which close to. In the morning the bed clothing is quite wet, the blankets about our shoulders presenting the appearance of a field after driving rain or a heavy fall of dew.*⁶¹

Another Chartist inmate, George White, reported that McDouall was “suffering sorely”: “He was in solitary confinement and not allowed to see, or speak to, any one”. In a public appeal McDouall’s wife, Mary Ann, complained that her husband’s health was failing as a result of “twenty-three hours close confinement out of twenty-four.”⁶² Despite



THE MODERN MILO.

vide—"The Life and Times of Feargus O'Connor."

regular assistance from Chartist victim funds, Mary Ann McDouall and their young children also suffered severe hardship during his imprisonment. Their anguish was greatly intensified by the death of their youngest daughter a few weeks before McDouall's release in June 1850.⁶³

McDouall emerged from prison claiming that he was going to "retire from the talking arena" and confine himself to "the pen and lancet" and he subsequently commenced a medical practice at Ashton-under-Lyne aided by his long time friend and fellow Chartist, William Aitken.⁶⁴ But McDouall had not retired from politics. As an old Chartist later wrote, "agitation had unfitted him for a regular life". Within weeks of his release he addressed a large Chartist meeting at Blackstone Edge on the Pennine moors telling the crowd "he had been imprisoned for two years in a small cell, yet he treated the authors of it with the most sovereign contempt".⁶⁵ In 1852 he stood for the NCA Executive — but was not elected. It was possibly this defeat, together with the parlous nature of the Chartist movement in decline, that convinced McDouall to emigrate to Australia, an intention which he publicly announced in July 1852.⁶⁶ As late as November 1852 McDouall was still actively engaged in Chartist debates on his old stomping ground of Manchester, but shortly thereafter the McDoualls left for Australia. According to later testimony of Mary Ann McDouall, her husband died shortly after they arrived. He was forty years old.⁶⁷ His widow and five children (aged between twelve and two) later returned to England where they lived as parish paupers in Liverpool before a subscription among old Chartist comrades of the "little doctor" helped them establish a stationary business at Nottingham.⁶⁸

"The People's Advocate"

McDouall's opposition to the "White Slavery" of the factory system is crucial to understanding his motivation for becoming "the people's advocate". His medical practice provided him with tangible evidence of its horrors, but his condemnation of the system was also tinged with moral outrage. "The factory system is rooted upon the worst passions of the human heart, avarice and ambition", he wrote, a revelation that gave him cause to fear for the future of Britain: "for one moment contemplate and believe and dread that this race of pale-faced slaves is to be the spring of another generation of people, the mind of the patriot sinks with fear, that of the philanthropist with horror, and that of the man with loudly expressed indignation".⁶⁹ For an alternative McDouall looked to the past. Although the "manifold evils of the factory system" were a relatively recent curse — "as late as 1793, the hand-loom weaver could earn enough by the labour of his hands" — the

outline of his hopes for a better future was to be found "at the very beginning of our history".⁷⁰ Long before the "Norman Yoke" had enslaved the democratic Saxon institutions of Alfred (the point at which most radical theories of a past golden age commenced), McDouall discovered Britain's "primitive Parliament", the Kyfr-y-then.⁷¹ The Kyfr-y-then, McDouall argued, was the apex of a truly republican democracy based on a communal property ownership. This system had been suppressed by the Saxons in the middle of the fifth century and from there it was all downhill: "We are now in 1841, contending against, and endeavouring to remove evils originating in the year 449".⁷² Delving into the mystical past was a common feature of a wider European romantic revolt against modernity. McDouall was in good company.⁷³

Peter McDouall was, in the words of Mark Hovell, "one of the least attractive as well as the most violent of the Chartist champions".⁷⁴ He could indeed be petulant and self-opinionated, and it is indisputable that he advocated arming and dabbled with insurrection. His belief, however, that physical force would ultimately be necessary to change Britain's political structure was based on an assessment of the likelihood that the occupants of the benches of the House of Commons could be persuaded to simply vote themselves out of existence: it was "absolute folly", he maintained, to expect that "anything" would be "done for the people, either by the present parliament or any other parliament, until they got universal suffrage".⁷⁵ Hovell further displayed his dislike of McDouall by suggesting that he operated out of "self interest" — an accusation that was often levelled at nineteenth-century popular leaders, and not always by their opponents. For example, in 1839 the Attorney General had alleged that McDouall's object was to fill "his own pockets at the expense of the poor", and a fellow Chartist, William Hill, brought similar charges against him in 1842 by questioning the NCA expenses.⁷⁶ On this score McDouall deserves to be defended. In 1849 he claimed to have spent "upwards of £1,000 in hard cash" in the early years of Chartism, and, although he subsequently lived off the movement, he strenuously denied that he had profited from either "pills, pamphlets or politics": "I have suffered imprisonment twice — exile once — and endured the privations of a wandering, houseless lecturer, during a period of ten years".⁷⁷ McDouall exchanged the relatively comfortable existence of a doctor for this life of uncertainty and hardship in the "trade of agitation" at a time when the modern concept of professional politics had not won acceptance. In this regard he was a pioneer.

NOTES

- 1 D. Jones, *Chartism and the Chartists* (1975), p.23; *Northern Star*, 5 June 1841, p.5; 25 June 1842, p.4; 20 May 1848, p.1; 1 July 1848, p.1.
- 2 The only exceptions are the brief portraits in C. Godfrey, *Chartist Lives: An Anatomy of a Working Class Movement* (New York, 1987), pp.517–19 and E. & R. Frow, *Chartism in Manchester 1838–1858* (Manchester, 1980), p.24; a short article by H. Weisser, "Dr Peter Murray McDouall", in J.O. Baylen & N.J. Grossman, eds., *Biographical Dictionary of Modern British Radicals*, vol.2, (Sussex, 1984), pp.323–26 and a more detailed piece in a relatively obscure political journal by R. Challinor, "P.M. McDouall and Physical Force Chartism", *International Socialism*, vol.2, no.12, 1981, pp.53–84. G.D.H. Cole admitted that he "seriously" considered McDouall for *Chartist Portraits* (1941), p.25.
- 3 E. Royle has suggested that only about half the delegates to the first Chartist Convention were "working men", *Chartism*, (1980), p.23. The concept of the "uneasy classes" is drawn from R.S. Neale, "Class Consciousness in Early Nineteenth Century England: Three Classes or Five?", *Victorian Studies*, vol.XII, no.1, September 1969, p.13.
- 4 E.P. Thompson, *The Making of the English Working Class* (Harmondsworth, 1980), p.902.
- 5 *The Topographical, Statistical and Historical Gazetteer of Scotland*, vol.2, 1848, pp.443–4 (we are grateful to Alex Tyrrell for this reference); *Northern Star*, 24 August 1839, p.5; *Manchester and Salford Advertiser*, 24 August 1839, p.4.
- 6 *The Topographical, Statistical and Historical Gazetteer of Scotland*, Vol.2, 1848, p.443. See P.A. Pickering & A. Tyrrell, "In the Thickest of the Fight": The Reverend James Scholefield (1790–1855) and the Bible Christians of Manchester and Salford", *Albion*, vol.26, no.3 (Fall 1994), pp.461–82; S. Roberts, "Joseph Barker and the Radical Cause, 1848–1851", *Publications of the Thoresby Society*, Second Series, 1 (1990), pp.59–73.
- 7 *Northern Star*, 3 October 1840, p.3; 10 July 1847, p.8; *British Statesman*, 26 November 1842, p.6; L.C. Wright, *Scottish Chartism* (1953), p.122.
- 8 For notice of the death of Andrew McDouall see *North Staffordshire Mercury*, 8 January 1842. His volume of poetry can be found in Dumfries Public Library; there is no date of publication.
- 9 T. Mackay (ed.), *The Autobiography of Samuel Smiles LLD* (1905), pp.28–9, 34, 45–6. H. Weisser, "McDouall", p.323, suggests that McDouall took his examination in 1836 before moving to Lancashire, although McDouall consistently stated that he moved to Ramsbottom in 1835.

- 10 B.T. Barton, *History of the Borough of Bury and Neighbourhood in the County of Lancaster*, (1874 repr. Manchester, 1973), pp.208–12; *Victoria History of the Counties of England* [Lancashire, eight volumes], vol.5, (1911), p.144.
- 11 S. Smiles, *Self Help* (1859, repr. 1968), pp.25–34; W. Axon, *Annals of Manchester* (Manchester, 1886), p.216; J. Mortimer, *Industrial Lancashire: Some Manufacturing Towns and their Surroundings* (Manchester, 1897), pp.201. Dickens is reputed to have based the Cheeryble brothers of *Nicholas Nickleby* on William and Daniel Grant.
- 12 F. Engels, *The Condition of the Working Class in England* (1845, repr. Moscow, 1977), pp.197–8n.
- 13 B.T. Barton, *Lancaster*, pp.210–12; F. Engels, *Condition*, p.227; *Voice of the People*, 8 January 1831, p.16; 15 January 1831, p.17, 24.
- 14 *Northern Star*, 23 March, 1839, p.3; 24 August 1839, p.5; *McDouall's Chartist and Republican Journal*, 5 June 1841, p.77; *Manchester and Salford Advertiser*, 24 August 1839, p.4.
- 15 P.M. McDouall, "Statistics of the Parish of Ramsbottom, near Bury, in Lancashire", *Journal of the Statistical Society*, vol.1, January 1839, pp.537–39; W. Felkin, "An Account of the Situation of a Portion of the Labouring Classes in the Township of Hyde, Cheshire", *Journal of the Statistical Society*, vol.1, November 1838, pp.416–20. Both papers had been read to the same meeting in August 1838. In 1842 William Cooke-Taylor wrote that Felkin's paper "excited much attention at the time; it was copied into nearly all the newspapers of Great Britain and America", *A Tour of the Manufacturing Districts of Lancashire* (1842, repr. 1968), p.184.
- 16 *Northern Star*, 23 March 1839, p.3; 24 August 1839, p.5; *McDouall's Chartist and Republican Journal*, 22 May 1841, p.61.
- 17 *PP. Select Committee on the Payment of Wages*, 1842, (471), vol. IX pp.96–105 (hereafter *Select Committee*); S. Smiles, *Self Help*, p.253.
- 18 *Northern Star*, 22 August 1840, p.7; *McDouall's Chartist and Republican Journal*, 24 April 1841, p.28; 10 July 1841, p.115.
- 19 *Northern Star*, 23 March 1839, p.3; 24 August 1839, p.5; *Chartist Circular*, 19 December 1840, p.264; *McDouall's Chartist and Republican Journal*, 10 April 1841, p.13; 17 April 1841, p.22.
- 20 *Northern Star*, 27 October 1849, p.3. See W.E. Adams, *Memoirs of a Social Atom* (1903, repr. 1967), pp.212–13, and *Northern Star* 5 May 1849, p.3, for other poems by McDouall. The extract is from *A Poetical Petition to Queen Victoria* which he penned in prison. In relation to this ode, F.B. Smith records W.J. Linton's disapproval, implying that it can be considered along with a "Loyal Address" adopted by the Convention, as promonarchist. On the contrary, there can be little doubt about McDouall's republicanism. See *McDouall's Chartist and Republican Journal*, 3 April 1841, p.67; 24 April 1841, p.33, 34; F.B. Smith, *Radical Artisan: William James Linton* (Manchester, 1973), p.34.
- 21 *Select Committee*, p.107. See also *Northern Star*, 22 August 1839, p.5.
- 22 *Select Committee*, p.107.
- 23 *Ibid.*, p.106; *Northern Star*, 22 August 1839, p.5; 4 August 1849, p.8.
- 24 R.G. Gammage, *History of the Chartist Movement* (1854, repr. New York, 1977), p.67; *Charter*, 7 April 1839, p.167.
- 25 *Charter*, 17 February 1839, p.54; 24 February 1839, p.77; *Manchester and Salford Advertiser*, 2 February 1839, p.4; 16 February 1839, p.3; 27 April 1839, p.4; W. Lovett, *The Life and Struggles of William Lovett* (1876 repr. 1976), p.169; B. Harrison & P. Hollis, eds., *Robert Lowery: Radical and Chartist* (1979), p.143.
- 26 Cited in A. Plummer, *Bronterre: A Political Biography of Bronterre O'Brien 1804–1864* (1971), p.108.
- 27 M. Hovell, *The Chartist Movement* (Manchester, 1918), p.145; W. Lovett, *Life and Struggles*, p.180; C. Behagg, *Politics and Production in the Early Nineteenth Century* (1990), p.211.
- 28 HO 40/53 fol.371, Wemyss to Napier, 20 April 1839. For the story of McDouall's arrest see R.G. Hall & S. Roberts, eds. *William Aitken: The Writings of a Nineteenth Century Working Man* (Tameside, 1996), p.348.
- 29 *Manchester and Salford Advertiser*, 24 August 1839, p.4; *Northern Star*, 24 August 1839, p.5; R.G. Hall & S. Roberts, *Aitken*, p.39; "Reminiscences of Thomas Dunning" repr. in D. Vincent, ed., *Testaments of Radicalism* (1977), pp.137, 140.
- 30 See *People's Paper*, 9 August 1856, p.4; C. Godfrey, "The Chartist Prisoners, 1839–41", *International Review of Social History*, vol.XMV, no.1979, pt.2, pp.216–17.
- 31 *Manchester and Salford Advertiser*, 22 June 1839, p.3; 29 June 1839, p.3; 5 October 1839, p.3; *Northern Star*, 22 August 1840, p.5; T.M. Kemnitz & F. Jacques, "J.R. Stephens and the Chartist Movement", *International Review of Social History*, vol.XIX, 1974, pt.2, p.224. McDouall alleged that Stephens had attempted to commit "a most indecent assault upon a young lady"; Stephens and his supporters retaliated, claiming that McDouall had diverted part of the Stephens' Defence fund for his own legal expenses.
- 32 R.G. Gammage, *History*, p.67; R.G. Hall & S. Roberts, *Aitken*, p.30. Aitken also notes that McDouall was part owner of a freehold property in Scotland. Dorothy Thompson has pointed out that so-called "interested agitators" often earned less than in the trade they had foregone, *The Chartists* (1984), p.163.
- 33 For advertisements of McDouall's pamphlets and pills see *inter alia* *Northern Star*, 19 September 1840, p.2; 5 March 1842, p.5; 23 April 1842, p.2; 14 December 1844, p.5; 2 September 1848, p.5; 5 May 1849, p.3. For a discussion of this issue see P.A. Pickering, "Chartism and the 'Trade of Agitation' in Early Victorian Britain", *History*, vol.76, no.247, June 1991, pp.221–37.
- 34 *Northern Star*, 22 August 1840, pp.78; 5 September 1840, p.5, 8; 12 September 1840, p.1, 6; 19 September 1840, p.1, 8; 3 October 1840, p.7; 17 October 1840, p.2, 3; 24 October 1840, p.1; D. Thompson, *The Early Chartists* (1971), pp.139–74.
- 35 *McDouall's Chartist and Republican Journal*, 17 July 1841, p.123. McDouall ended the Scottish tour after he quarrelled with John Collins. George White recalled: "When in Scotland I have been ready to vomit at the paltry jealousies between Collins and McDouall". Cited in S. Roberts, *Regal Politicians and Poets in Early Victorian Britain* (Lampeter, 1993), p.7. *English Chartist Circular*, no.30, p.117, gives details of McDouall's lecture tour for the spring of 1841; Derby Local Studies Library holds handwritten police reports of two lectures given by McDouall in September 1841.
- 36 R.G. Gammage, *History*, p.67; HO 45/249c fols. 325, 333.
- 37 W.E. Adams, *Memoirs*, p.212.
- 38 *Northern Star*, 22 August 1840, p.8; 5 September 1840, p.5.
- 39 *McDouall's Chartist and Republican Journal*, 17 April 1841, p.17–19; 24 April 1841, p.25. See also E. Yeo, "Some Practices and Problems of Chartist Democracy", in J. Epstein & D. Thompson eds., *The Chartist Experience* (1982), pp.345–80; P.A. Pickering, *Chartism and the Chartists in Manchester and Salford* (Basingstoke, 1995), pp.668.
- 40 *Northern Star*, 5 June 1841, p.5.
- 41 *McDouall's Chartist and Republican Journal*, 17 July 1841, pp.121–2; *Northern Star*, 3 July 1841, p.8; M. Hovell, *Movement*, p.239. John Foster suggests that McDouall failed to attract even a majority of the artisan vote. See J. Foster, *Class Struggle and the Industrial Revolution* (1974), p.104.
- 42 T. Cooper, *The Life of Thomas Cooper* (1872; repr. 1971), pp.156–61. See also *McDouall's Chartist and Republican Journal*, 12 June 1841, pp.81–2.
- 43 McDouall was on bail having been arrested in the last week of July in Deptford. His treatment by the police was raised in Parliament by Thomas Duncombe. See *Hansard* [House of Commons], LXV, 1 August 1842, cols. 898–922.
- 44 HO 45/249c fol.218, enclosure, August 1842.
- 45 P.M. McDouall, *Letters to the Manchester Chartists* (Manchester, 1842), p.9.
- 46 R.G. Gammage, *History*, pp.228–9; *British Statesman*, 1 October 1842, p.9.
- 47 *Northern Star*, 26 November 1842, p.7; 3 December 1842, pp.6, 7; 17 December 1842, p.4; 24 December 1842, pp.1, 4; 7 January 1843, p.1; 4 February 1843, p.1; *British Statesman*, 19 November 1842, p.6; *Poor Man's Guardian*, 5 August 1843, pp.86–7. See also D. Jones, *The Last Rising* (Oxford, 1986), p.202.
- 48 *British Statesman*, 1 October 1842, p.9; 22 October 1842, p.9; 26 November 1842, p.6; 3 December 1842, p.7; 17 December 1842, p.6; *Northern Star*, 20 August 1842, p.1; *English Chartist Circular*, no.89, pp.147–8; R. Challinor, 'P.M. McDouall', p.83n.
- 49 A Member of the Chamber of Deputies, Cabet had fled to England in 1834 after criticising the government.
- 50 *Movement: Anti-Persecution Gazette and Register of Progress*, 2 April 1845, p.116; R. Challinor, 'P.M. McDouall', p.72. It is easy to understand what attracted McDouall; mythical Icarie was a democratically controlled state where families enjoyed happy lives free from want and full of healthful and rational pursuits and minimal labour (even the factories are clean, brightly painted and well lit). See C.J. Johnson, *Utopian Communism in France: Cabet and the Icarians 1839–1851* (Ithica, 1974), pp.48–61. Aitken spent part of his self-imposed exile in the Mormon community at Nauvoo in Illinois which was later taken over by the Icarians.
- 51 *British Statesman*, 1 October 1842, p.9; 8 October 1842, p.6; 22 October 1842, p.9; 26 November 1842, p.7; 17 December 1842, p.6; *Northern Star*, 17 February 1844, p.1; 25 January 1845, p.1; *English Chartist Circular*, no.129, p.305, for John Cleave on McDouall's reluctance to flee to France and the need to support him and his family.

- 52 *Northern Star*, 25 January 1845, p.1; 8 February 1845, p.6; 15 February 1845, p.6; R.G. Gammage, *History*, pp.258-9; A. Wilson, *The Chartist Movement in Scotland* (Manchester, 1970), pp.209-11.
- 53 *Northern Star*, 2 January 1847, p.1. For his appointment as an official lecturer on behalf of the Company and reports of his tours see *Northern Star*, 10 July 1847, p.8; 28 August 1847, p.7; 25 September 1847, p.8; 6 November 1847, p.6.
- 54 *Northern Star*, 31 July 1847, p.8; 14 August 1847, p.1; 4 September 1847, p.1.
- 55 "Rules of the National Land Company", *PP. First Report from the Select Committee on the National Land Company*, 1847-8, vol.XIII, App.1, p.50; *Northern Star*, 11 September 1847, p.8.
- 56 *Northern Star*, 12 February 1848, p.8; 19 February 1848, p.8. In March McDouall stood, at short notice, as a Chartist candidate at a by-election for Carlisle. After a victory at the nomination he came last in the poll securing fifty-five votes. See *Northern Star*, 18 March 1848, p.1; *The Times*, 7 March 1848, p.6; 16 March 1848, p.6.
- 57 *Northern Star*, 20 May 1848, p.1; 1 July 1848, p.1.
- 58 D. Goodway, *London Chartism 1838-1848*, (Cambridge, 1982), pp.86-9, 228; J.C. Belchem, "The Spy System in 1848: Chartists and Informers An Australian Connection", *Labour History*, no.39, November 1980, p.25.
- 59 *Northern Star*, 22 July 1848, pp.1, 4, 8; 29 July 1848, p.1; 2 September 1848, p.5; R. Challinor, *A Radical Lawyer in Victorian England* (1990), pp.162-3.
- 60 See M.E. DeLacey, "Grinding Men Good? Lancashire's Prisons at Mid-Century", in V. Bailey ed., *Policing and Punishment in Nineteenth Century Britain* (1987), pp.182-216.
- 61 *Northern Star*, 17 March 1849, p.8.
- 62 George White to Mark Norman 1849, in R.G. & R.M. Black eds., *The Harney Papers*, (Assent, 1969), p.90; *Northern Star*, 5 May 1849, p.5.
- 63 *Northern Star*, 5 May 1849, p.3; 4 August 1849, p.8; 25 August 1849, p.5; 8 September 1849, p.1; 17 November 1849, p.1; 5 February 1850, p.4; 23 March 1850, p.3; 8 June 1850, p.1.
- 64 *Red Republican*, 3 August 1850, p.52; *Northern Star*, 29 June 1850, p.5; W.E. Adams, *Memoirs*, p.212; *Newcastle Weekly Chronicle*, 8 March 1884; we are grateful to Owen Ashton for his assistance in obtaining this report.
- 65 W.E. Adams, *Memoirs*, p.212; *Northern Star*, 20 July 1850, p.1.
- 66 *Northern Star*, 17 June 1852, p.5; 17 July 1852, p.4; *People's Paper*, 28 August 1852, p.3.
- 67 *People's Paper*, 6 November 1852, p.3; *Newcastle Weekly Chronicle*, 8 March 1884. There is no record of McDouall's arrival in Australia in the Colonial Secretary's *Reports of Vessels Arrived*, 1853 (Victorian State Library, Ms. AO LOC., 4/5243, 4/5244). The story that he drowned in the shipwreck of the *President* off the Australian coast is apocryphal. During this period the *President* was permanently anchored in Hobson's Bay, Melbourne, where it served as a prison hulk. See M.A. Syme, *Shipping Arrivals and Departures: Victorian Ports, vol. 2, 1846-1855*, (Melbourne, 1987), p.698; J. Loney, *Australian Shipwrecks, vol.2, 1851-1871* (Sydney, 1980). McDouall's death is not recorded in any of the official notices of the Australian colonies. In his reminiscences Robert Gammage raises and rejects the notion that McDouall did not in fact emigrate, but died in poverty near Manchester. See W.H. Maehl ed., *Robert Gammage: Reminiscences of a Chartist* (Manchester, 1983), pp.23-4.
- 68 W.E. Adams, *Memoirs*, p.212; *People's Paper*, 9 August 1856, p.4; *Newcastle Weekly Chronicle*, 8 March 1884; C. Godfrey, *Chartist Lives*, p.519; R. Challinor, 'P.M. McDouall', p.81.
- 69 *McDouall's Chartist and Republican Journal*, 3 April 1841, p.6; 26 June 1841, p.101.
- 70 *Ibid.* 10 April 1841, p.13; 8 May 1841, p.42.
- 71 See C. Hill, "The Norman Yoke", *Puritanism and Revolution* (1968), pp.58-125.
- 72 *McDouall's Chartist and Republican Journal*, 8 May 1841, pp.41-2; 15 May 1841, pp.49-50.
- 73 See, for example, J. Hutchinson, *The Dynamics of Cultural Nationalism: the Gaelic Revival and the Creation of the Irish Nation State* (1987).
- 74 Hovell, *Movement*, p.263.
- 75 *Manchester and Salford Advertiser*, 27 April 1839, p.4.
- 76 Hovell, *Movement*, p.263; *The Trial of Dr McDouall*, cited in J. West, *A History of the Chartist Movement* (1920), p.128.
- 77 *British Statesman*, 3 December 1842, p.7; *Northern Star*, 4 August 1849, p.8.