

Analysing the sources

Source A, an extract from a Chartist hymn, does not tell us very much about the role of O'Connor as a leader of Chartism but it does reflect the adulation that he received and the great respect in which he was held by Chartists. Thomas Cooper expands on this in Source C where he explains why O'Connor won the admiration and trust of the working-class Chartist rank and file. Cooper's own opinion of O'Connor's leadership changed after 1842; he became much more critical and distanced himself from O'Connor. Cooper was a relatively minor Chartist leader. William Lovett was much more significant. In your comments on Source B the examiner will expect you to know that Lovett had been the secretary of the London Working Men's Association, had drafted the People's Charter, had challenged O'Connor for the soul of the movement and had failed. All this might help to explain the violence of his attack on O'Connor in his autobiography. Source D presents us with a modern interpretation of O'Connor's place at the centre of Chartism as the man who sustained it successfully for ten years. Without him it might have collapsed into ineffective failure much sooner.

Using the sources in your answers

Remember, the examiner will be looking for the way you refer to the sources in your answers. Certainly, the mark scheme for the longer essay type question will restrict the level of mark your response will receive if you only refer to the sources, or to your own knowledge.

Part (a) is the starter question to focus you on to the topic and task. As such, it is only worth a small proportion of the total marks available. Answers should be brief and to the point. The 'Chartist movement' could be an essay in itself! What are the key points you need access for three marks? At the lowest level that it was a working-class political agitation for parliamentary reform, but at the higher level that it demanded the implementation of the six points of the People's Charter and that it flourished during the difficult economic times of the late thirties and the 'hungry Forties'. You have said what Chartism was, and have placed it in its context, and have not got bogged down in explaining each of the six points.

If part (a) is about knowledge, part (b) is asking for some evaluation and analysis. What is the value of Source B in assessing the role of O'Connor? This is where you need to show your knowledge of Lovett's place in the Chartist movement to explain his damning attack on O'Connor. Superficially, the extract suggests that O'Connor did more harm than good to the Chartist movement and that it would have been more successful without him. Elsewhere, Lovett described O'Connor as the 'great "I AM" of politics'. A mere paraphrase of Lovett's comments would only score in the lower levels of the mark scheme. What doesn't this extract tell us? What is missing? Historians would now argue that however misguided he was O'Connor did keep the movement alive through the pages of the *Northern Star* and initiatives like the Chartist Land Plan. High levels of the mark scheme would be accessed by some explanation of the tensions among the Chartist leaders and the scornful way in which O'Connor dismissed Lovett's ideas for working men to show their readiness for the vote by displaying their moral worth.

You will be expected to refer to both sources and your knowledge in your responses to part. Be explicit in your references - don't assume that the examiner will recognise

your indirect references. Highlight them - 'In Source C Cooper explains why the working-class Chartists put their trust in O'Connor', not 'O'Connor won the trust of the working class because they believed he was honest in his leadership'. In preparing your answer to this kind of question it is worth going back to the sources and highlighting in different colours points that can be used to support or to challenge the statement. Source B is useful here because it focuses on the case against O'Connor's leadership while reminding you of the divisions that existed between the different Chartist leaders, the 'moral force, physical force' debate. Sources A, C and D give a different slant to the role of O'Connor. A and C indicate his popularity and the reasons for it while D points to his pre-eminent role in keeping the movement alive. The *Northern Star* provided a focus for the movement through good and bad times. This does not mean that leadership was not inept. There was a failure to devise an effective alternative to the petitioning strategy that failed so abysmally in 1839, 1842 and 1848. No wonder disillusioned Chartist supporters drifted away. You are, however, asked whether you agree or disagree. A balanced response requires reference to more than the leadership skills and qualities of an O'Connor or a Lovett. Your knowledge should bring in a wider range of factors to explain what went wrong, for example:

- ♦ The determined way in which both Whig and Conservative governments responded to the Chartist challenge.
- ♦ The changes in technology (railways and telegraph) and policing methods that gave government an advantage over their predecessors.
- ♦ Middle class unwillingness, even among radicals, to accept the six points.
- ♦ The local variations in the aims and purposes of Chartists.
- ♦ The 'hunger politics' issue - Chartist peaks coincided with the bad years of 1838-9, 1842 and 1847-8, and the return of a broader prosperity after 1848 finally undermined the movement as social discontent evaporated.

Reference to these factors will be needed to reach the higher levels in the mark schemes.

It is interesting to reflect on changes in historical interpretation. Until the 1960s historians tended to accept Lovett's attacks on O'Connor uncritically. G. Kitson Clark wrote in 1962 that he was a 'braggart', an 'egoist', under whom the movement was 'conspicuously ill-led'. In the 1980s this began to change with the publication of J. Epstein's biography of O'Connor that began a major re-assessment of his role and contribution reflected in Dorothy Thompson's comments in Source D.

Conclusion

- ♦ Make sure that you know what the examiner is looking for, and the skills that are being tested.
- ♦ Get hold of some mark schemes to get a flavour of what will get the higher level marks.
- ♦ Read carefully; make margin notes; use highlighters to focus on the key phrases or points needed in answers.
- ♦ Be explicit in references to sources.
- ♦ Remember that knowledge as well as analytical skill is being tested here.
- ♦ Don't forget that the longer answer will need to be organised as an essay not a series of discrete points.