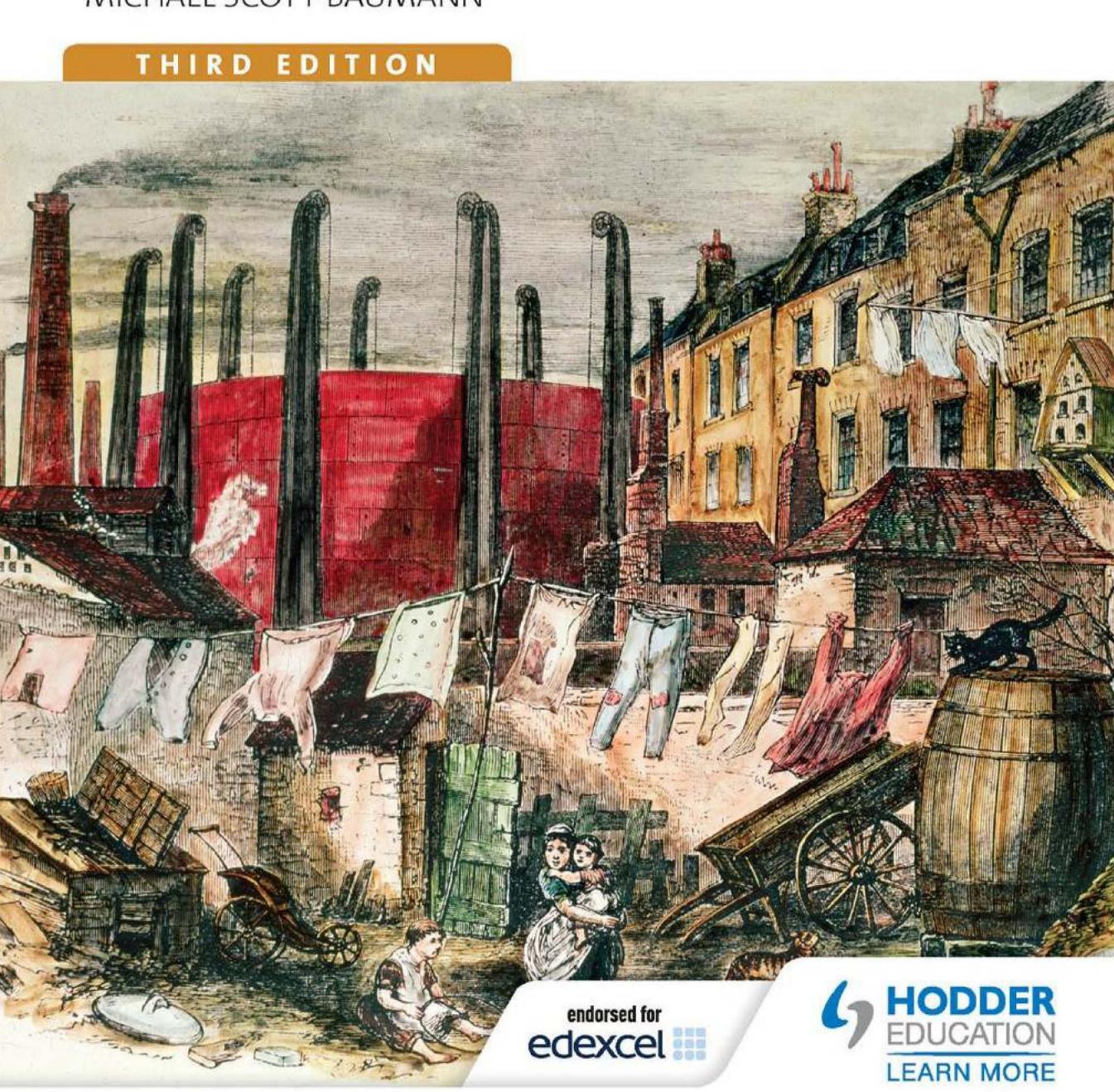
## access to history

# Protest, Agitation and Parliamentary Reform in Britain 1780–1928

MICHAEL SCOTT-BAUMANN





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MICHAEL SCOTT-BAUMANN

THIRD EDITION

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#### Dedication

#### Keith Randell (1943-2002)

The Access to History series was conceived and developed by Keith, who created a series to 'cater for students as they are, not as we might wish them to be'. He leaves a living legacy of a series that for over 20 years has provided a trusted, stimulating and well-loved accompaniment to post-16 study. Our aim with these new editions is to continue to offer students the best possible support for their studies.

## The unreformed political system in the 1780s

This introductory chapter will examine how Britain was governed and, in particular, how the electoral system worked, in the 1780s. The key themes are:

- ★ The political system in the 1780s
- ★ The electoral system in the 1780s

Between 1780 and 1928, Britain was transformed from a largely agricultural, rural society to an industrial, urban society. It also experienced a political transformation: from a state ruled by a monarchy and aristocracy to a parliamentary democracy. This occurred through the passing of a series of Representation of the People (Reform) Acts of Parliament, the most important of which were in 1832, 1867, 1884-5, 1918 and 1928. Chapters 2 and 3 will examine how and why those changes took place and assess their impact on how Britain was governed and on the development of political parties. First, however, it is necessary to examine the unreformed system.



## The political system in the 1780s

► To what extent did the aristocracy dominate political life?

In 1780, Britain was undergoing sweeping economic and social changes. The country was in the throes of the Industrial Revolution. Yet the political system remained largely unchanged. At the very top of this system was the monarch.

#### The role of king and the aristocracy

The king could appoint and dismiss a prime minister. He could also insist on having a say in the appointment of other ministers. George III, who was king at this time, frequently used his powers to do so. However, the monarch had to take account of the wishes of Parliament if he was to influence their policies and get them to agree to the taxes without which his government

could not operate. Thus, if a parliamentary leader had a large body of support in the House of Commons, the king was usually obliged to make him prime minister.

Both government (the ministers) and Parliament were dominated by the landowning classes. In fact, Britain was largely governed by a few thousand landowning families who, between them, held more than half the agricultural land. Generation after generation inherited the land and, with it, the wideranging power and influence which they had wielded for hundreds of years. The most important of these landowning families were members of the aristocracy. Their ancestors had been made nobles with titles like lord, duke, viscount or earl, by earlier kings and queens and they had thus become members of the House of Lords.

The landowning aristocracy assumed their right to supremacy to be natural. Their status was hereditary so that the right to a seat in the House of Lords was passed on to succeeding generations. Their central power base was the House of Lords but they had huge influence over the House of Commons as well. This was because nearly half of the Members of Parliament (MPs) owed their seats to peers (members of the House of Lords). For instance, many MPs were the sons, younger brothers, cousins or friends of members of the House of Lords. The landed classes held the highest positions in the Church, the armed services, the judiciary and the civil service. They also dominated local government.

#### Whigs and Tories

Parliament consisted of two Houses, as it does today. The House of Lords was made up of hereditary peers whereas the House of Commons was elected. However, only a small percentage of the male population had the vote. This is explained more fully on page 4.

The majority of MPs were landowners, although an increasing number were men who had made their money in trade or industry. Many MPs saw themselves as independent and most belonged to either the Tory or the Whig Party. The main similarities and differences between Whigs and Tories are summarised in Table 1.1 (see page 3).



**Aristocracy** The nobles, or peers, who inherited landed titles which gave them the right to sit in the House of Lords.

**Table 1.1** Comparing Tories and Whigs in the 1780s. How clear were the distinctions between Tories and Whigs?

#### **Tories and Whigs**

These parties were loose groupings that had originally developed out of the struggle between Crown and Parliament in the civil war of the seventeenth century. They were not as well organised as modern political parties.

Both were dominated by landowning families, and family networks often determined whether an individual became Tory or Whig.

Both parties were led by Anglicans, that is, members of the Church of England (the official State Church).

There were more similarities, in background and belief, than there were differences between the two parties in 1780.

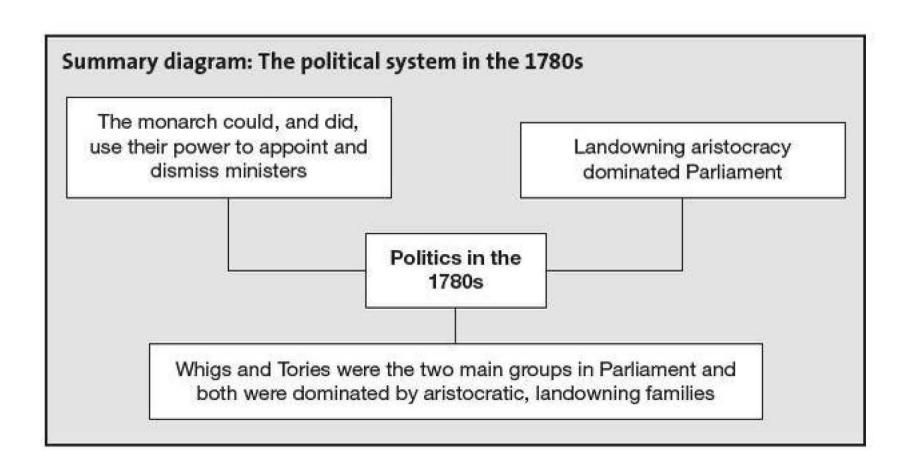
The Tories	The Whigs
The Tories were particularly keen to defend the power of the monarch and the Church of England.	The Whigs were more likely to question the power of the monarch and to defend the power of Parliament.
Nearly all the Tories came from landowning backgrounds.	Although their leaders were mostly landowners, an increasing number of Whig MPs came from industrial or commercial backgrounds.
The Tories were more protective of the privileges of the Church of England.	Whigs were more sympathetic to, and had more support from, Nonconformists
The Tories were more resistant to change and more fearful of the ideas of the French Revolution.	The Whigs began to demand reform of Parliament in the late 1820s.

#### **KEY TERMS**

Nonconformists People who were Protestants but not members of the Church of England. Examples were Baptists, Quakers, Presbyterians and Methodists.

#### French Revolution

A series of events, starting in 1789, which led to the fall of the monarchy and of the aristocracy in France.





# The electoral system in the 1780s

#### ▶ What were the main features of the electoral system?

In 1780 there were 658 MPs; today the number is 650. Like today, the country was divided up into constituencies: that is, areas in which MPs were elected and sent to Parliament, to sit in the House of Commons. However, there the similarities end.

The first major difference from today is that most constituencies returned two members to Parliament (they were not single-member constituencies like today). Secondly, these constituencies were of two types: the *county* seats and the *borough* seats. In England, there were 82 county seats and 403 borough seats. There were also two seats each for the ancient universities of Oxford and Cambridge.

This system of county and borough seats had grown up over many centuries. It originated in the Middle Ages when the king called up two knights from every shire (or county) and two burgesses (townspeople) from every borough to make up the House of Commons in Parliament. The counties, or shires (like Bedfordshire, Berkshire, Buckinghamshire, and so on), were largely rural. The boroughs were mainly country towns and ports: they had become boroughs when the king gave them the right to send an MP to Parliament. This meant that towns that had been important in preindustrial times had MPs to represent them while new industrial towns, like Manchester and Leeds, had no MPs (see Figure 1.1, opposite).

#### Who could vote?

In 1780, the total population of England, Scotland and Wales was nearly 10 million. For the whole of the United Kingdom, including Ireland, it was 14 million. Only a small minority of men had the right to vote. Historians estimate that less than half a million men were entitled to vote. This was about five per cent of the total population. In the counties, all men who owned freehold property worth 40 shillings (£2) – roughly £400 in today's money – a year could vote. These people were known as 'forty-shilling freeholders'.

In the boroughs, there was not a uniform or consistent franchise (voting qualification); instead, there was a huge variety of franchises. The five main types are summarised in the box.



Figure 1.1 The geography of the unreformed system. In what ways does this map show how uneven the unreformed electoral system was?

#### Voting qualifications in borough constituencies

- Scot and lot boroughs. All adult males who paid 'scot and lot' (local) taxes, such as rates for the relief of the poor, could vote.
- Potwalloper boroughs. All men who occupied a house ('who had a family and boiled a pot') could vote. These were constituencies with the biggest electorates, and the best known example was Preston, where the radical Henry Hunt was elected MP in 1830.
- Burgage boroughs. All men who owned burgages (ancient plots of land or other property) could vote.
- Corporation boroughs. Only members of the local town council (or corporation) could vote.
- Freeman boroughs. All men who had been granted the title of 'freeman' could vote. This status could be inherited from one's parents.

As shown in the box, there were some boroughs, like Preston, where almost all men had the vote. There were others, large towns like Norwich and Nottingham or big seaports like Bristol and Liverpool, which had several thousand voters. But many boroughs had very small numbers of men who were entitled to vote.

#### Pocket boroughs

In some of these boroughs with only a small electorate, the biggest landowner (or local businessman) in the area had huge influence and was able to get himself or his **nominee** elected. These boroughs were known as 'pocket boroughs' as the landowners were seen to have them in their pockets. There were various ways in which this could be done. The voters may have voted for the landowner because they were his tenants or their jobs depended on being employed by him. Such a prominent local figure was often the local magistrate and that might be another reason to keep on his right side. Sometimes, the electors were happy to be bought out and would sell their votes for as high a price as they could get. Votes could be sold for as much as £10, equivalent today to over £500.

#### Rotten boroughs

In some extreme cases, there were only ten or twenty voters in a borough. This might be because what had been a town in the Middle Ages had now decayed and contained very few inhabitants. For example, the borough of Dunwich, on the east coast of England, had virtually disappeared after hundreds of years of coastal erosion so that only a few houses were left. Old Sarum, in Wiltshire, largely consisted of a number of mounds, ditches and castle remains. It had only seven voters. These extreme examples were known as 'rotten boroughs'.

Over 50 constituencies had fewer than 50 voters each. In such constituencies, boroughs could be bought and sold. They came to be seen as the property of powerful 'patrons' or the government. The borough of Gatton was sold for £90,000 in 1801 and changed hands again in 1830 for £180,000, which would be equivalent to about £9 million today.

#### How were elections run?

Elections were very different from today. For a start, they lasted for several days. This was to give everyone time to get to the **polling station**. In a large county like Yorkshire, it might take several hours to get to the county town of York to cast your vote, so several days were allowed. But the most striking difference is that voting was open: there was no **secret ballot**. Instead, electors voted by show of hands. This obviously meant that they might be pressurised: if the local landowner or his supporters were there to see how people voted, electors might feel that they had to vote for him or his nominee. After all, the elector's livelihood may depend on him. Historians now believe that about 25 per cent of county electors came under the direct influence of their landlords.



Nominee Someone who is put forward for election. Over 200 MPs were nominated by an aristocratic patron who sat in the Lords. In other words, members of the House of Lords had huge control over the composition of the House of Commons.

Pocket borough A borough constituency that was in the control, hence the pocket, of a particular patron, usually a large landowner. The majority were controlled by Tories.

**Rotten borough** A borough with few or no constituents yet which returned at least one MP to Parliament.

**Polling station** A place where you go to vote.

**Secret ballot** Casting a vote in secret, as is done today.

If such influence did not work, the candidates could bribe the electors with food, drink and entertainment at election time. Electors could be provided with transport to get to the polling station, especially if they lived some distance away, and they might be put up for the night.

Since elections lasted for several days, some of them had the atmosphere of a carnival. Elections could be boisterous, sometimes riotous. There were colourful processions, with banners and placards. Insults, and sometimes missiles, were thrown. And not only the electors were involved. Those who did not have the vote could still be employed to whip up support for a particular candidate or to put pressure on those who were likely to vote for the opposing candidate. If voters could not be relied on to vote the desired way, they could be 'cooped'; that is, kidnapped and kept drunk until the election was over.

How useful is Source A to a historian?

#### **SOURCE A**



This engraving, made by William Hogarth in 1754-5, shows the violence and excitement of an election.

#### Why were some elections not contested?

In many constituencies there was no contest at election time. The winner was decided beforehand and no election took place. There were several reasons for this. First, the patron, or owner, of a pocket borough often had no opponent and both the seats went to his nominees. In effect, the seat in Parliament was owned by the local leader. As we have seen, seats in Parliament could actually be bought. Many leading members of the government first entered Parliament this way. When the industrialist Robert Peel bought a country estate at Tamworth in Staffordshire, he effectively bought a seat in Parliament. His son, also called Robert (see page 14), succeeded him as MP for Tamworth and went on to lead the Tories and become prime minister.

Even if no one family controlled the parliamentary seat, a deal might be done between two leading families so that each took one seat in Parliament. In the 1830 general election, there was not a single contest in Wales; no Welshman had the chance to vote that year.

#### Support for the old system

The old electoral system strikes us now as chaotic, corrupt and unfair. So how could anyone defend it? One argument was that the very different types of voting qualifications gave a wide variety of people the vote. For example, it was not only the rich who could vote: in the borough of Westminster, which had a large electorate, 12,000 were entitled to vote and many craftsmen and traders did so. In the counties, the 'forty-shilling freeholder' franchise included many farmers and not just the biggest landowners. In the county of Yorkshire, for instance, there was an electorate of over 20,000.

Many argued that, even if not all men had the vote, all the different interests were represented. For example, in a port like Liverpool, the merchants were said to represent the interests of the sailors and the dockworkers while, in the countryside, the landowners had the best interests of their tenants in mind and thus represented all members of the agricultural interest. This was called 'virtual representation'.

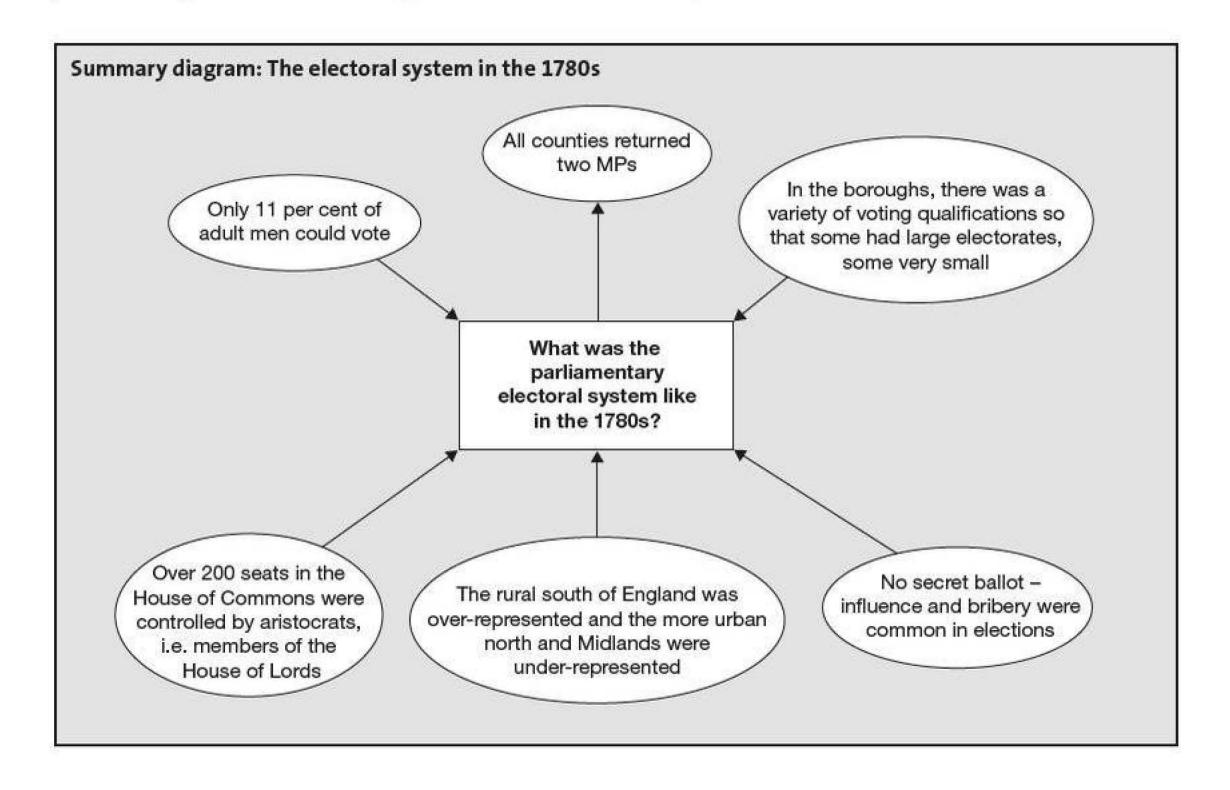
Another feature which is difficult for us in modern Britain to appreciate is that this was a very **deferential** society: many people looked up to the local leader. Many voted for him out of traditional respect or simply because they had always done so. They might feel it was in their own best interests to support their local leader's politics. This does not mean to say that they would follow their leader unwillingly. In 1830, Lord Penrhyn spent £30,000 on bribes to the electors of Liverpool but his opponent was elected. A year later, in the 1831 election, thousands of voters defied their traditional leaders and voted for the candidates who supported parliamentary reform; the Tories, who opposed reform, lost nearly all the county seats.



**Deferential** Showing respect for people, in this case for those of a 'higher' class.

Even the pocket or rotten boroughs were defended by some on the grounds that they had enabled talented young men to rise to the top while still young. For example, Robert Peel had entered Parliament in such a constituency.

A further argument in defence of the electoral system was that it had lasted for hundreds of years, so why change it? It had served Britain well, it was said. By 1815, Britain was the most advanced industrial nation, with the largest navy in the world and a huge overseas trading empire. Furthermore, Britain had avoided the violence and killings of revolutionary France. So why challenge this stability and wealth by changing the electoral system? Yet the demands for parliamentary reform did not disappear, as will be seen in Chapters 2 and 4.



# The origins and impact of parliamentary reform 1780–1860

Pressure for parliamentary reform, and staunch resistance to it, were present from the 1780s to 1830. Then, when the Whigs came to power in 1830 they decided to reform Parliament and the way it was elected. The reasons for reform and for resistance to it are examined, as is the campaign for the bill. The impact of the Representation of the People (Reform) Act 1832, the development of political parties and the declining influence of the Crown are also addressed. These are examined through the following themes:

- ★ Support for parliamentary reform 1780-1830
- ★ The campaign for, and resistance to, the Reform Bill 1831–2
- ★ The impact of the Representation of the People (Reform) Act 1832

780		House of Commons motion criticising increasing power of the	1831	Dec.	Whig government introduced a third Reform Bill
		Crown	1832	May 7	House of Lords' committee
1785		Defeat of proposals for			rejected the third Reform Bill
		parliamentary reform in Parliament			Whig government resigned
1830	Nov.	Whig government was appointed		May 14	Wellington failed to form
1831	March First Refe	First Reform Bill introduced and			government
		later rejected			Whigs returned to power
	May	General election		June	King persuaded Lords to pass the
	June	Second Reform Bill introduced			Reform Bill
	Sept.	Second Reform Bill passed by the	1834		Tamworth Manifesto and
	осре.	Commons	1050		emergence of 'Conservatives'
	Oct.	House of Lords rejected the	1859		Liberal Party made up of Whigs, Peelites and radical MPs
	<b>O</b> ct.	second Reform Bill			
		Riots in several cities			Abolition of the property qualification for MPs



# Support for parliamentary reform 1780–1830

- Why was there growing demand for reform?
- Why did the Whigs support parliamentary reform?

#### Reform in the 1780s

By 1780, there were growing calls for parliamentary reform. At this time, Britain was in the midst of the **War of American Independence** and there was rising criticism of the way the war was being conducted. With the support of an increasingly active press, some MPs attacked the government for raising higher taxes and increasing government expenditure. Furthermore, they claimed that the king was imposing policies on his ministers and using **patronage** to achieve majority support in Parliament which did not reflect the people's wishes. For evidence of this, they could point to the increasing number of contracts (for example, to provide military supplies for the war) which the government had granted, many of which had gone to MPs or their relatives or friends, thus winning more support for the government in Parliament.

Thus, the government was accused of being corrupt as well as inefficient. Its opponents demanded 'economical' reform to reduce government expenditure (for example by cutting the number of government offices). In 1780, a motion was debated and passed in the House of Commons: 'that the power of the Crown has increased, is increasing, and ought to be diminished'. The majority of MPs who supported this motion probably saw it as criticism of the prime minister, not of the king personally. In the following years there was a reduction in royal patronage, for instance, in the number of government ministers and offices, but it was only a small step from calls for 'economical' reform to demands for parliamentary reform.

In 1785, two years after defeat in America, the prime minister, William Pitt, proposed reform of Parliament since 'the people were loud for a more equal representation'. He proposed to **disenfranchise** 36 of the worst rotten boroughs and redistribute their 72 seats to London and the more highly populated counties. (At that time, rural Cornwall had 44 MPs while fast-industrialising Lancashire had only thirteen.) However, his **bill** failed to secure majority support in Parliament. Many MPs saw the disfranchisement of boroughs as an attack on property rights. It was also widely known that the king was opposed to the bill.

Although parliamentary reform was widely discussed, support for it in the country was patchy. There was strong support in London, especially at times of more general unrest or agitation. Furthermore, some of the industrial and commercial middle classes supported reform in order to weaken the grip of the



#### **KEY TERMS**

War of American
Independence This lasted
from 1776 to 1783 and
ended with Britain recognising
the independence of the
colonies which became the
United States of America.

**Patronage** The practice of appointing people to government positions in order to secure their political support.

**Disenfranchise** Deny the right to a seat in Parliament.

**Bill** A proposal for a new law which, if passed, becomes an Act of Parliament.

landed classes on Britain's political life. However, parliamentary reform was mostly a stick with which to beat an unpopular government. Once the American war was ended, in 1783, and taxes and government expenditure had been cut, the demand for parliamentary reform declined. However, the French Revolution in 1789 was to change all that, as explained in Chapter 4.

During the war against the French, from 1793 to 1815 (see page 61), the calls for parliamentary reform had quietened down, partly because of government action to stifle such demands and partly because of a patriotic sense of duty to concentrate on winning the war (see pages 58–62). However, after the end of the war, in 1815, the reform agitation was reignited and attracted increasing support, especially from the working classes. This took the form of a radical campaign calling for complete **manhood suffrage**. (This campaign is examined on pages 64–72.)

#### Reform and the middle classes

Most of the property-owning middle classes did not support this **radical** campaign. They were just as opposed to demands for complete manhood suffrage as the landowning classes. They did not want democracy where all men had the vote. That would be 'mob rule'. Instead, they wanted the vote for men like themselves, 'responsible' citizens who owned property. There was a widespread belief among the middle and upper classes that only those who owned property had a right to vote. They were the ones who had a stake in the country, in the form of property, and so could be entrusted with the vote. For this reason, most of the property-owning classes, whether rural or urban, opposed the radical reform campaign in the years from 1815 to 1820.

However, many of the middle classes did favour some measure of parliamentary reform. One of the main reasons for this was that Britain was now an increasingly industrialised nation in which the new middle classes – factory owners and bankers, merchants and shopkeepers – were demanding more of a say in the government of the country and that Parliament should not be controlled just by wealthy landowners. Above all, these people pointed out the fact that the largely rural south of England was over-represented in the House of Commons and the more densely populated industrial areas of the north and Midlands were very under-represented. A few examples will illustrate this:

- All counties, whatever their size, returned two MPs to Parliament:
  - Rutland was the smallest, with a population of just 19,000.
  - Yet the industrialised county of Lancashire, with a population of 1,300,000, also had only two seats (see Figure 1.1, page 5).
- The differences were even more marked in the boroughs:
  - In Cornwall, where medieval kings had granted borough status to many ports and fishing villages, there were 21 borough seats, sending 42 MPs to Parliament, although the population of Cornwall was only 192,000.



#### Manhood suffrage

The right to vote for all adult men.

Radical 'Radix' is Latin word for 'root', hence radical reform is fundamental reform – from the roots.

- Yet the city of Manchester, with a population of 180,000 in 1831, had no seat of its own. (That did not mean that none of those living in Manchester could vote: those who owned property worth 40 shillings could vote in the county election for Lancashire but they had to travel all the way from Manchester to the county town of Lancaster, a journey of several hours, to cast their vote.)
- Like Manchester, the fast-growing cities of Birmingham (population 144,000) and Leeds (population 123,000) had no seat of their own in Parliament.

#### The demand for reform 1820-30

Although many in the middle classes may have wished for more representation in Parliament, the demand for reform became quieter when the economy revived in the early 1820s. In 1820, the Whig leader, Earl Grey, told his son-in-law that he did not expect to see a Reform Act 'during my life, or even yours'. From 1824 to 1829 there were no petitions for reform presented to Parliament.

However, the demand for some kind of reform never subsided completely. The reformers continued to highlight the worst abuses of the unreformed system so that rotten boroughs (see page 6) such as Dunwich and Old Sarum became notorious. In 1821, Parliament even agreed to disenfranchise the corrupt Cornish borough of Grampound and allot its two seats to Yorkshire. In the more stable political climate of the 1820s, parliamentary reform seemed a respectable and realistic goal for the middle classes. The problem was that, while the Tories dominated government, there was little chance of reform being passed by Parliament and the king, George IV, was certainly opposed to it.

-	$\sim$
H'arl	Grev
Lan	CILCA

1764	Bom Charles Grey into an aristocratic Whig family in Northumberland
1786	Elected MP for Northumberland
1793, 1797	Introduced bills for parliamentary reform which were defeated
1806	Became leader of the Whigs in the Commons
1806-7	Foreign secretary
1807	Inherited his father's title of earl and moved to the House of Lords
1830-4	Prime minister of Whig government
1845	Died

From his early days in Parliament, Grey had been a supporter of moderate parliamentary reform as the best way to get rid of the

injustices of the old system and avoid revolution. Most of his career was spent in opposition apart from a brief spell as foreign secretary. He was leader of the Whigs through the years of Tory domination. He finally came to power as prime minister, at the age of 58, when Wellington's Tory government collapsed in 1830. Grey is mainly remembered for steering the Reform Bill through Parliament in 1831–2.



#### **KEY TERMS**

Political unions Popular organisations created to campaign for reform of Parliament.

Act of Catholic **Emancipation** An Act of Parliament allowing Roman Catholics the right to become MPs or to hold other public office.



#### KEY FIGURES

#### Arthur Wellesley, first Duke of Wellington (1769 - 1852)

Army general who led British forces to victory over Napoleon at the Battle of Waterloo in 1815. Was Tory prime minister 1828-30.

#### Robert Peel (1788 - 1850)

Tory home secretary 1822–7 and 1828-30. He steered Catholic Emancipation through the House of Commons.

Then, in the years 1829–30, the whole political scene changed dramatically. This transformation was caused by:

- the passing of Catholic Emancipation
- the accession to the throne of King William IV
- the emergence of political unions.

#### The passing of Catholic Emancipation

In the late 1820s, there was a well-organised campaign in Ireland for Catholics to be given full political rights. It attracted huge support among the mostly Catholic population and, fearing the outbreak of full-scale rebellion in Ireland, the Tory government hurriedly passed the Act of Catholic Emancipation in 1829. Many Tories regarded this as a betrayal of their party and of the Church of England, and an assault on the British constitution. Many Tory MPs never forgave the prime minister, the Duke of Wellington, and Sir Robert Peel, the Tory leader in the House of Commons.

#### The accession to the throne of King William IV

The death of King George IV, in June 1830, necessitated a general election. Against a background of recent poor harvests, rising unemployment and a revival of radical demands for reform, the government suffered further losses in the elections and still had no firm majority in Parliament. When the new Parliament met in November 1830, Wellington made a speech in which he said he saw no need to consider any change to the parliamentary system: 'the legislature [Parliament] and the system of representation possesses the full and entire confidence of the country'.

Wellington seemed to be blocking any discussion of reform yet, at this time, an increasing number of people, both inside and outside Parliament, were discussing the need for some kind of reform. The Whigs were pushing for parliamentary reform and they were now stronger and more confident. The Tories were divided and demoralised while the Whigs had a monarch, in William IV, who was not opposed to them, as King George IV had been. For the first time in many years, the Whigs looked like a realistic alternative to the Tory government. When embittered Tories joined the Whigs to defeat the government in Parliament, Wellington resigned and the new king invited Earl Grey (see profile on page 13), the Whig leader, to form a government.

#### The emergence of the political unions

In 1829–30, the demand for reform was beginning to gather more support. This occurred at a time of growing economic discontent and fear of widespread public disorder. The political temperature was further raised by the news of another revolution in France in July 1830. It was not as violent or as large scale as in 1789, but it led to the downfall of the Bourbon monarchy and the establishment of a new king. This stirred up old fears of domestic radicalism (see Chapter 4)

and revolution. Meanwhile, in several cities across Britain, political unions, or societies, reappeared. This resurgence in reform agitation was partly a response to deteriorating economic conditions but was also a result of the recent general election and the events in France.

The most notable political society was the Birmingham Political Union (BPU), led by Thomas Attwood. Its first meeting attracted a crowd of 15,000. It aimed to achieve reform of Parliament through the pressure exerted by a 'general political union of the lower and the middle classes of the people'. Attwood had noticed, in the recent campaign in Ireland, the impact which public pressure, with mass support, could have on the government. Perhaps reform of Parliament might be achieved in the same way?

Not all societies attracted the same mixture of middle- and working-class support as the BPU. The Metropolitan Political Union, founded in London by Henry Hunt (see profile on page 67), was dominated by artisans and craftsmen, many of whom had been active in radical politics in the years after 1815 (see pages 64-72). Some societies were decidedly middle class in composition, made up of merchants, lawyers and businessmen who were keen to make government more responsive to the needs of trade and industry. Political societies were formed in Manchester, Leeds, Sheffield and many other towns and cities. Their membership and aims varied but they all added to the pressure 'out of doors' for reform of the political system. Meanwhile, in Parliament, MPs increasingly recognised that continued resistance to demands for reform would only provoke violence. The Whigs were not as out of touch as the Duke of Wellington had been and, in March 1831, they introduced a bill for the reform of Parliament in the House of Commons.

#### The Whigs and reform

The Whig government, which was appointed in November 1830, decided to make parliamentary reform a priority. Clearly, the government would have to deal with the worst abuses of the present system. That would mean getting rid of the rotten boroughs and providing seats in Parliament for the big new towns that were not already parliamentary boroughs. But Earl Grey and his ministers were not revolutionaries. They wished to preserve rule by the landed classes, men like themselves, with the support of the middle classes, and to 'purify' the present system. In order to work out the details of the reform, Grey formed a four-man committee and instructed them that he wanted reform:

- 'Large enough to satisfy public opinion'; that is, enough to pacify the demands coming from meetings, petitions, demonstrations and the press.
- 'To afford sure ground for resistance to further innovation'; that is, reform which would settle the agitation once and for all.
- 'Based on property'; that is, voting qualifications based on property, certainly not universal suffrage. Grey did not want democracy.



#### **KEY TERMS**

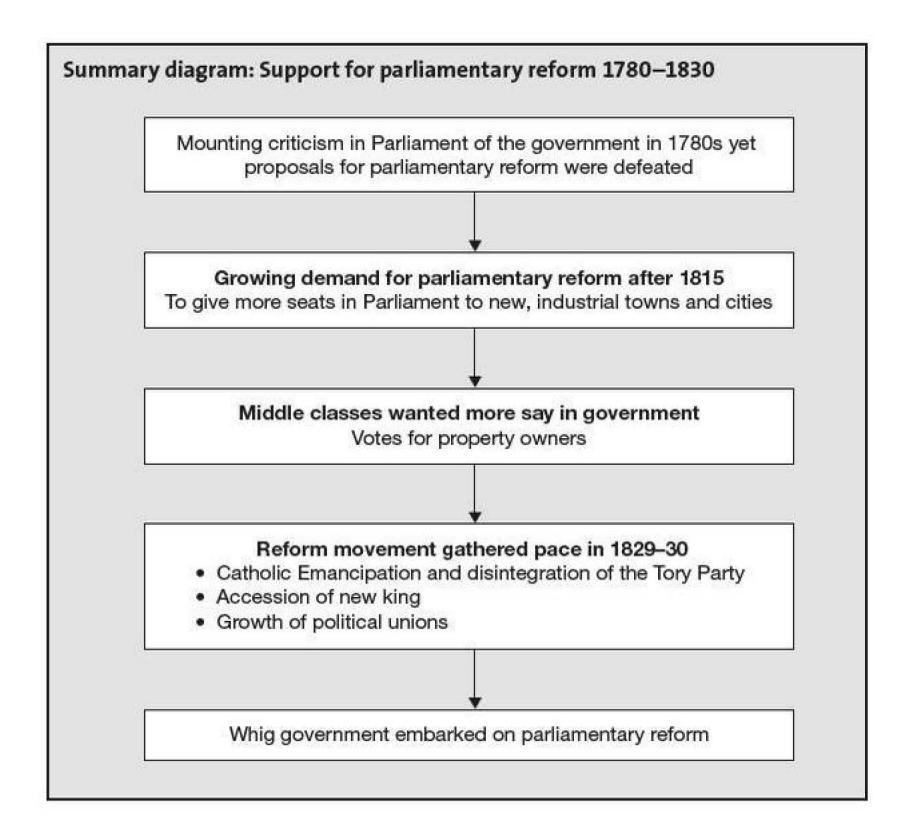
Birmingham Political Union (BPU) Formed in 1830 by Thomas Attwood, a banker from Birmingham, in order to campaign for parliamentary reform. It attracted middle- and working-class support, although Attwood did not believe in universal suffrage.

'Out of doors' Political activity beyond Parliament, for example, agitation 'out of doors' meant agitation in the country as a whole.

#### Universal suffrage

The vote for all people. In practice, at this time, it meant for all men (manhood suffrage).

- [Based] 'on existing franchises and territorial divisions'. Grey was probably thinking of the 40-shilling (£2) qualification in the counties and wanted to preserve constituency boundaries.
- [That would] 'Run no risk of overthrowing the [existing] form of government'.
   Grey believed in aristocratic government and wanted to win over the middle classes and bring them into partnership with the landowners. He wanted to 'reform in order to preserve'.





# The campaign for, and resistance to, the Reform Bill 1831–2

- What were the main arguments for and against reform?
- Why did it take so long to pass the Reform Bill?

#### The first Reform Bill, March 1831

The reform committee made proposals to the full Cabinet and a bill was presented to the House of Commons in March 1831. It produced an 'absolutely electrifying shock'. Most MPs had expected a fairly moderate measure, getting rid of some rotten boroughs and transferring their seats to a few of the bigger towns. Instead, the bill deprived 60 boroughs of both of their MPs and another 47 of one of their MPs. Many of their seats were awarded to new, industrial towns. The bill also established a uniform voting qualification in the boroughs: all those who owned or rented a house worth £10 a year in rent would be enfranchised.

The Tories were horrified at the reform proposals. Sir Robert Peel, the Tory leader in the Commons, opposed the bill because he believed it would not be 'final' and that further demands for reform would later be made. MPs would see that they could gain popularity by promising further change and so, in Peel's words, they 'will offer votes and power to a million men and will quote your precedent [example]'.

#### **SOURCE A**

From a speech by the Tory MP Sir Robert Inglis on 1 March 1831, quoted in D. Murphy, G. Goodlad and R. Staton, *Britain 1783–1918*, Collins, 2003.

The House of Commons is now the most complete representation of the interests of the people, which was ever assembled in any age or country. It comprehends [includes] within itself, those who can urge the wants and defend the claims of the landed, the commercial, the professional classes of the country, the privileges of the nobility, the interests of the lower classes, the rights and liberties of the whole people.

In response to Peel and other Tories, a young Whig, Thomas Macaulay, stressed that most of the working classes would not qualify under the £10 householder qualification in the boroughs. Rather, he said, the bill would enfranchise the middle classes. They would be won over 'to the side of security and stability' and thus provide the best possible guarantee against a revolution.

Study Source A. On what grounds does Inglis justify his claim that the House of Commons is 'the most complete representation of the interests of the people'?

Study Source B. Who, according to Macaulay, should have the qualification to vote?

#### SOURCE B

From a speech by Thomas Macaulay, a Whig MP, in the House of Commons, 2 March 1831, quoted in Vyvyen Brandon, *The Age of Reform 1820–1850*, Hodder Education, 1994. Born in 1800, Macaulay was a student, and later a Fellow, at Cambridge University. He became an MP in 1830 and later served as a government minister.

If the labourers of England were in that state in which I, from my soul, wish to see them, — if employment were always plentiful, wages always high, food always cheap, — if a large family were considered not as an encumbrance but as a blessing — the principal objective [objections] to Universal Suffrage would, I think, be removed ... But, unhappily, the lower orders in England, as in all old countries, are occasionally in a state of great distress ... [which] makes even wise men irritable, unreasonable and credulous — eager for immediate relief, heedless of remote consequences ... It blunts their judgement, it inflames their passions, it makes them prone to believe those who flatter them, and to distrust those who serve them,

I oppose Universal Suffrage because I think it would produce a destructive revolution. I support this measure, because I am sure it is our best security against a revolution ...

I support this measure as a measure of Reform; but I support it still more as a measure of conservation ... We say, and we say justly, that it is not by mere numbers, but by property and intelligence, that the nation ought to be governed. Yet, saying this, we exclude from all share in government vast masses of property and intelligence, vast numbers of those who are as interested in preserving tranquillity, and who know best how to preserve it. We do more. We drive over to the side of revolution those whom we shut out from power.

In fact, most MPs, whether Whig or Tory, wanted to maintain stability and avoid a revolution. The difference was that Tories like Peel thought that giving in to demands for reform would endanger the whole political system and bring revolution nearer, whereas the Whigs thought that reform would stave off revolution by winning over the middle classes and stifling the demand for complete manhood suffrage.

#### The defeat of the bill, April 1831

When the vote was taken on the second reading of the bill in the House of Commons, the government won by a single vote. However, when the bill was examined in detail in committee (see the box opposite), it was picked apart and it became clear that major amendments would be made and it would be defeated. The Whigs were furious. They asked the king to dissolve Parliament and call a new election. If they secured a large majority in Parliament, they would inflict a defeat on the Tories. Furthermore, once reform had enfranchised the middle classes, the Whigs were confident of being able to stay in power for many years. The king, however, was reluctant to agree.

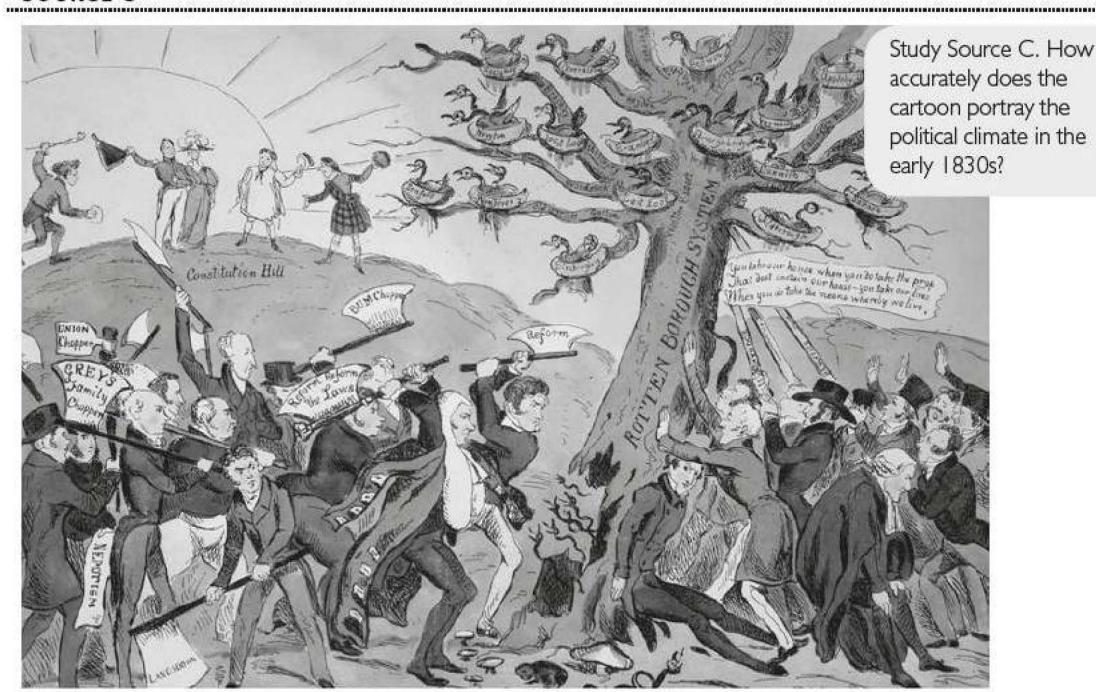
After all, there had been a general election just six months before. And, with recent poor harvests, riots in parts of the countryside and huge political demonstrations in the cities, the atmosphere was already overheated.

#### The stages by which a bill becomes an Act of Parliament

- First reading: an announcement to the House of Commons that a proposal for reform will be introduced. The first Reform Bill was introduced in March 1831.
- Second reading: the main outlines of the bill are debated and voted on. If defeated in a vote, the proposal is withdrawn. The first Reform Bill was passed by one vote on its second reading.
- Committee stage: a committee of MPs studies the bill in detail and can make amendments. The first Reform Bill was defeated at this stage.
- Report stage: the bill is reported back to the full House of Commons, where it can be debated and amended.

- Third reading: the amended bill is 'read' and passed.
- In the House of Lords, the bill goes through the same procedure as in the Commons. The Lords can reject a bill passed by the Commons (this was true up to 1911) and they did this to the second Reform Bill in October 1831.
- Royal assent: when the bill has passed through both Houses of Parliament, the monarch signs it and it becomes law, an Act of Parliament. The monarch has not refused to sign a bill since 1703.

#### SOURCE C



'Chopped: "The Reformers' Attack on the Old Rotten Tree", a cartoon from *The Times* in 1832. Reformers chop down a tree of rotten boroughs while opposition Tories try to prop it up. Ordinary British people watch from a distance as the sun rises.

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Grey, however, was determined. He persuaded the king that reform of Parliament would pacify public opinion and cause the agitation in the country to die down. In other words, reform would be the best guarantee of peace and stability. Now the Whigs had to secure a majority in Parliament in order to get reform passed.

#### 'The bill, the whole bill and nothing but the bill!'

Right across the country, there was huge backing for 'The bill, the whole bill and nothing but the bill!' Although it would not give the vote to most of the working classes, the bill still attracted widespread support. After all, this was the first major reform of Parliament for 200 years and, even if manhood suffrage was not granted immediately, many radicals thought it was more likely to be passed later by a reformed Parliament.

Most of the middle-class reformers did not want manhood suffrage. But they knew that they needed the support of huge numbers behind their demand for reform in order to convince the government not to back down. This national agitation enabled the government to keep up the pressure on the king and those in Parliament who were opposed to reform.

The election campaign was characterised by vast open-air meetings, with banners waving and band music blaring. Major newspapers, such as *The Times*, supported reform and gave huge coverage to meetings and petitions for reform. The leaders of the reform movement emphasised that reform would be good for 'The Nation' and for 'The People'. In this way, they papered over any divisions between what the moderates and the more radical reformers wanted. This appearance of class unity was quite new and created the impression of a relentless, unanimous movement for reform.

#### The second Reform Bill, June to October 1831

The election swept the Whigs back to power with a majority of over 130 seats in Parliament. In 76 of the 82 county seats, where voting was generally freer than in the boroughs, pro-reform candidates were successful. Many aristocratic patrons found that, despite their money and their influence, their candidates were defeated.

The Whigs introduced a second Reform Bill. It was slightly more moderate than the first: the main change was that the Whigs agreed to a Tory amendment that extended the vote in the counties to tenants who rented land worth £50 a year, not just to those owning property worth £2 a year. This was a concession to the landed classes as it was expected that these tenant farmers would vote the same way as their landlords. This might placate some of the landowning Tories, while many of the Whigs, themselves mostly landowners, were happy to support this conservative move. After all, the Whigs intended that this reform should preserve a Britain dominated by the landowning classes.

The second Reform Bill was eventually passed by the House of Commons in September 1831. Now it would have to be passed by the House of Lords. This is where it could be heavily rejected as the Tories were in a large majority in the upper house. In early October, before the bill was presented to the Lords, Thomas Attwood, the leader of the BPU, had a meeting with Grey. Attwood was planning a big demonstration and Grey hinted that now was the time for the BPU to make itself felt.

Attwood organised a huge march in Birmingham. It was to be orderly, to impress the authorities, and a reporter from *The Times* was invited to ensure publicity. About 100,000 joined in, ranging from bankers to miners. Speeches were made and a petition to Parliament was approved. The next day, Attwood presented the petition, along with 79 others from around the country, to Parliament. *The Times* reported the march of the previous day and warned the aristocracy not to resist the people. Would the Lords take note of the warning?

When the bill was introduced to the House of Lords, Prime Minister Earl Grey told his fellow peers of what might happen if they rejected the bill:

#### SOURCE D

### From a speech by the prime minister, Earl Grey, in the House of Lords, 3 October 1831.

Will your Lordships reject a measure sanctioned [agreed] by an overwhelming majority of representatives of the people in the other House – the people themselves, at the same time, roused and agitated from one end of the country to the other ... I implore your Lordships to consider what will be the consequences of the rejection of this measure; and whether, if rejected now, it can finally be put aside. May you, my Lords, be wise in time and avoid those dangers which will inevitably arise from your rejection of this measure, and secure, by its adoption, peace and conciliation in the country.

#### Rejection and riots

The Lords rejected the bill and riots broke out in Nottingham, Derby and Bristol which then had to be suppressed by troops. In Bristol, one of the main targets was the bishop, who had voted against the bill in the Lords: his palace was burned down. So was the house of the Bristol MP who was an outspoken opponent of reform. Many government buildings were destroyed and the city centre was ruined.

Whigs and Tories, aristocracy and middle classes were all shocked by this violence. It could discredit the reform movement. Above all, it might scare the government into backing down and dropping their reform proposals. It would certainly strengthen the Tories' accusation that reform would lead to revolution and civil war. For the reformers, both inside and outside Parliament, it was essential to show that the reform movement was organised and disciplined,

Study Source D. How and why did Grey warn the Lords of the dangers of rejecting reform? responsible and law-abiding. If that was the case, then the government would have no pretext for suppressing meetings and demonstrations, and the Tory opposition would have no reason for blaming the reformers for the disorder.

#### The response of the political unions

The middle-class leaders of the political unions, men like Thomas Attwood of the BPU, understood this well. They needed the support of the masses in order to keep up sustained pressure on the Whig government. But they also had to avoid giving the government any reason for repression. A well co-ordinated, national reform movement would be far harder to defeat than a violent mob.

Attwood and other leaders of the campaign outside Parliament now found themselves caught between the Tory opponents of reform and the masses. The latter threatened to discredit the moderate reformers and they might scare the Whig government into losing its nerve. The reformers wanted peaceful, mass protest, both as a warning to the Tories and to strengthen the government's resolve.

Meanwhile, however, more militant members of the political unions were demanding more active, forceful agitation. Some of the more radical leaders were pointing out that the Whig Reform Bill was deliberately designed to exclude the working classes. Henry Hunt, one of the few radical MPs in Parliament, said that 'the bill will exclude nine-tenths of the male adult population from any share in the representation whatever'. The Whigs, and their allies outside, had to take the initiative if their moderate Reform Bill was to be passed.

#### The third Reform Bill, December 1831 to May 1832

In December 1831, the Whigs introduced a third Reform Bill and it passed the Commons with a two to one majority. Now the question was: would the Lords reject yet another Reform Bill? If so, what action would the government take? And, what was the attitude of the king?

The king, under pressure from Earl Grey, said that he would consider creating enough Whig peers to enable the bill to pass the Lords. The Cabinet estimated that this might mean creating 50 or 60 peers. But for how *long* would the king agree to this? After all, many MPs felt that such a request from the government would be putting too much pressure on the king. Grey himself thought that to create as many as 50 or 60 peers was 'a measure of extreme force'. The Whig leaders called for patience. But many reformers, both in Parliament and in the country as a whole, feared that the Whig leaders were weakening.

In April 1832, Grey introduced the bill in the House of Lords. He spoke of the 'clamour outside', referring to the agitation across Britain, of 'a great and intelligent people' who deserved to have some say in the government of the country. The debate lasted for five days. Some of the speeches lasted for two or three hours. Finally, at dawn on 15 April, after a debate that went on through the night by candlelight, the Lords passed the new bill. But it still had to be examined by a House of Lords' committee and this is where it could be unpicked and sent back, as an amended bill, to the Commons. The political temperature was rising.

#### Whig resignation, May 1832

The pressure was also building up outside Parliament. At a huge meeting of the BPU on 7 May, Attwood made his most famous statement: 'I would rather die than see the great bill of Reform rejected or mutilated in any of its great parts or provisions'. Grey and the Whig leaders now told the king that if the bill was not passed unamended, they would resign. This may have been intended as a threat; reports from the Court suggested that the king's advisers were opposed to the creation of more peers. The Whig leaders may have been bluffing. If so, their bluff was called: when the Lords' committee rejected the bill on 7 May, the Whigs were forced to resign. The king now looked to the Tories to form a government. It was widely expected that the Duke of Wellington would lead a new government.

#### The 'Days of May' 1832

Although the Whig leaders may have been surprised at how quickly the king accepted their resignations, some of them seemed quite relieved. Months of tension, pressure and argument had taken their toll. Perhaps the whole reform question could be settled by a Tory government with the support of moderate Whigs in Parliament. Now the Whigs could only wait and see: Would the Duke be able to form a government? What would be the reaction of the political unions?

The Duke of Wellington, who had accused the Whigs of inciting revolution with their Reform Bill in April, now recognised that any new government would have to pass some kind of parliamentary reform in order to settle the whole question and calm the widespread agitation. Several Tories refused to serve in a government that was going to pass reform, many of them still angry with Wellington and Peel for pushing through Catholic Emancipation. The key question was: what would Peel's reaction be? It would be difficult to form any Tory government without the active support and leadership of Sir Robert Peel in the Commons. Peel was not completely opposed to reform. In fact, he realised that the whole question needed to be settled. But, he was not going to be the one to do it. He had opposed the first Reform Bill and he refused to go back on his word. Peel had been accused of breaking his word over Catholic Emancipation and he was not going to damage his career even further by doing so again.

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#### **KEY FIGURE**

#### Francis Place (1771–1854)

A tailor by trade, active in radical politics since the 1790s. Previously a supporter of manhood suffrage, Place now accepted the need to work with men of 'money and influence' in order to get the Reform Bill passed.



#### **KEY TERMS**

#### Rough-sharpening

Sharpening swords in such a way that they would inflict 'a ragged wound', one more likely to fester and cause slow death.

'Days of May' The tense days in early May 1832 when the king refused to create new peers, Wellington tried to form a government, some huge demonstrations were held and there was even talk of armed conflict.

#### 'To Stop the Duke, Go for Gold'

While Wellington tried to form a government, the political unions were determined to do all they could to block any Tory administration. There was talk of mass refusal to pay taxes and even of armed resistance. On 12 May, a meeting of delegates from various political unions met in London. During the meeting, **Francis Place** printed on a piece of paper:

TO STOP THE DUKE GO FOR GOLD

Place was proposing that those holding paper money should demand its gold equivalent from the banks, thus depleting stocks and causing a financial collapse. This would cause massive disruption to the economy so that businesses would not be able to borrow money to keep up their production. This was the kind of widespread, but peaceful, resistance that a government would find difficult to handle. Within four hours of the meeting, placards with Place's newly coined slogan were appearing all over London and being distributed to other towns.

#### The threat of civil war

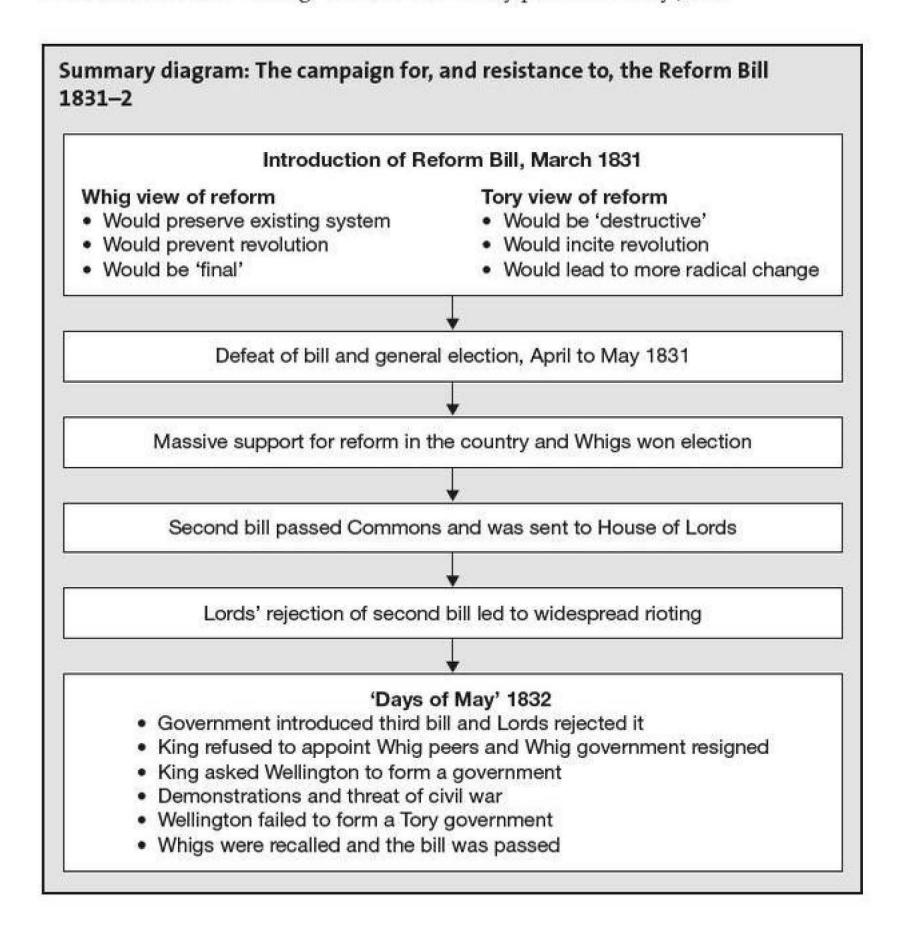
Wellington hated the political unions: he could not see the difference between the more militant unions and the constitutional, non-violent ones. As far as he was concerned, they were all as bad as each other; they were creating disorder and were planning an armed uprising. Therefore, they should be put down with force. In October 1831, he had said: 'The people of England are very quiet if they are left alone; and if they won't [be quiet], there is a way to make them.'

Would the Duke carry out this threat? A soldier, Alexander Somerville, wrote in his diary: 'It was rumoured that the Birmingham Political Union was to march for London that night and that we were to stop it on the road.' On Sunday 13 May, his regiment was ordered to start 'rough-sharpening' their swords. This was the first time the soldiers had been ordered to do this since the Battle of Waterloo in 1815.

The air was full of rumour, gossip and bluff. Would Wellington be able to rely on the loyalty of the troops or would they refuse to use their swords against civilians? Place's call for a 'run on the banks' was effective. The banks' stocks of gold, which had been falling for some time, were now falling even more quickly and the leading banker, Lord Rothschild, warned that only the recall of Earl Grey would stop the slide. Such was the overheated, tense atmosphere of the so-called 'Days of May' in 1832.

#### The king recalls the Whigs, May 1832

On 14 May Wellington had to face the fact that he could not form a government; too many leading Tories were refusing to serve in his Cabinet. Ultimately, it was Wellington's inability to form a government that led to the end of the crisis. When he admitted that he could not form a government, the king had no choice but to ask the Whigs to return. This time, they insisted on a firm promise. They would only return once the king had promised to appoint the necessary number of Whig peers to get the Reform Bill passed by the Lords. He agreed but, in the event, he did not need to carry out this promise. The king's secretary let it be known that he wanted the Lords to drop their opposition. Most of them did so and abstained from voting. The bill was finally passed in early June.





## The impact of the Representation of the People (Reform) Act 1832

- ► How much was changed by the Reform Act?
- ► How significant was the passing of the Reform Act?

The main terms of the Act are summarised in the box below.

#### The effects of the 1832 Reform Act

#### The redistribution of seats

- · 56 rotten and pocket boroughs lost both of their MPs.
- 30 boroughs lost one MP.
- 22 new boroughs with two MPs were created and 14 of these were in London and the northern industrial towns: Manchester, Leeds, Bradford, Sheffield, Bolton, Blackburn and so on.
- 19 new boroughs with one MP were created.
- 64 new county seats were created so that the more populous counties gained more seats.
- 18 English seats were transferred to Scotland, Wales and Ireland.

#### Voting qualifications

In the boroughs

- Adult males owning or occupying property worth £10 a year in rent.
- In the counties
- Adult males owning property worth £2 a year.
- · Adult males renting land worth £50 a year.

#### Change and continuity in the Reform Act

The main elements of change and continuity are summarised in the box on the next two pages.

Table 2.1 Change and continuity in the 1832 Reform Act

Elements of change	Elements of continuity
Redistribution of seats	
A total of 145 borough seats were abolished. This was a massive change, especially as there had been virtually no changes for hundreds of years.	About 70 pocket boroughs remained, mostly in the control of prominent landowners.
Many of these seats were awarded to the large towns and cities of the north and other industrial areas. As a result, there was a huge increase in the number of urban voters.	31 boroughs had fewer than 300 voters, while cities like Manchester, Leeds and Birmingham each had several thousand, so there were still huge differences in the size of electorates.
The number of county seats was increased and, generally, these were more 'open' seats, less likely to be controlled by individual patrons or prominent landowners.	The rural south was still over-represented relative to the industrial north, as were small country towns relative to bigger industrial towns, some of which still did not gain parliamentary seats.
Electorate/voting qualifications	
There was now a uniform system of franchises or, rather, two systems: one for borough, and one for county, constituencies. This replaced the confusing variety of franchises under the old system.	Ownership of property was still the basis of the franchise. This meant that the vast majority of the working classes were excluded from the electoral system.
It is difficult to assess the increase in size of the electorate because we do not have accurate figures for the number of voters before 1832, but historians estimate that the electorate increased from about 490,000 to 800,000 which is a rise of about 60 per cent. Nearly one in five adult males now had the vote in England.	Less than 20 per cent of adult males could vote in England.
Most of the working class were excluded from the vote. House prices: the £10 householder qualification in the bo vote in London, but very few did in Leeds, where house p	roughs meant that some of the working class had the
The biggest single occupational group to be enfranchised was shopkeepers. Most of the middle classes, and some skilled craftsmen, now had the vote.	Most of the new electors were small property owners, more interested in preserving their own property and privileges than in demanding further reforms, and so tended to be 'conservative'.
Power of the aristocracy	
The number of parliamentary seats controlled by members of the House of Lords was reduced as there were now far fewer pocket boroughs.	Landlords, many of them aristocratic, continued to exert influence, both in the remaining pocket boroughs and in county elections. The £50 tenant farmers enfranchised in the counties could be expected to vote the same way as their landlords, especially as voting was still 'open' and not secret.
The power and prestige of the House of Lords no longer seemed so formidable as they had been forced to back down over the passing of the Act. This had shown that a government with a majority in the Commons and the backing of the electorate could force a monarch to persuade the Lords to accept laws to which they were opposed. The dominance of the Commons was confirmed and enhanced.	Most Cabinet ministers and all prime ministers in the next 30 years, except Sir Robert Peel, were members of the aristocracy.

#### Power of the middle classes

The new middle classes, especially the manufacturing interest, were now more solidly represented in Parliament. Many thousands of urban dwellers in cities such as Manchester, Birmingham, Leeds and Bradford now had the vote for the first time.

Very few industrialists entered Parliament as MPs. There were several reasons:

- they were too busy running their own businesses, whereas big landowners left their estates in the hands of agents
- · there was no payment for MPs
- you had to own land worth £600 to be able to stand as a parliamentary candidate.

Professional men, such as lawyers and doctors, continued to form the majority of middle-class MPs.

The middle classes had been recognised and admitted into the political system. Following the Reform Act, the Whigs introduced new, similar, voting qualifications for local government in 1835 and many businessmen became actively involved in local politics and administration. Here they were able to deal with the issues that affected everyday life, such as public health and education (which were not dealt with by central government in those days).

The landed classes continued to dominate Parliament. In the post-reform election of December 1832, about 75 per cent of the MPs elected were landowners. Fewer than 100 were from industrial or commercial backgrounds.

#### Elections

There was a significant increase in the number of contested elections after 1832. In the previous 30 years, on average about 30 per cent of parliamentary seats were contested at election time. In the next 30 years, the average was to be over 50 per cent. In other words, there was a big increase in the number of people who had a real choice at election time.

With no secret ballot and a continuation of 'open' voting, there continued to be much bribery and intimidation. Employers and, especially, landlords still had much influence.

#### Registration of voters

The need to have the names of all voters on an electoral register gave a boost to the development of more efficient party organisation.

Elections continued to be as noisy and chaotic as before, as shown by Charles Dickens' *Morning Chronicle* report during the 1835 election in Northampton: 'The noise and confusion here this morning – which is the first day of polling – is so great that my head is actually splitting. There are about 40 flags on either side, two tremendous bands and vehicles are constantly driving about and down the town, conveying voters to the Poll; and guzzling and howling and roaring in every house of Entertainment.'

#### The impact on the Crown

The position of the monarchy was undoubtedly changed by the Reform Act. First, the king had been pressurised into agreeing to appoint more Whig peers in May 1832. Never before had a monarch been forced to give in to such pressure. Secondly, it was no longer so easy for the king to appoint and dismiss ministers as it had been before. This became clear in 1834–5. In 1834 the king dismissed the Whig government which he so disliked and he invited Peel to form a

government (see page 31). However, even after a general election, in January 1835, in which the Tories won back nearly 100 of the seats that they had lost to the Whigs in 1832, Peel was unable to form a government because he did not command majority support in the House of Commons. He was forced to resign and the king had to invite the Whigs to form a government. The monarch could no longer rely on patronage (see page 11) to maintain the government he wanted in power. Public opinion and party politics were now increasingly important and the Crown's influence over the composition of the government was significantly reduced.

As explained on page 27, the power of the House of Lords in relation to the House of Commons was also now diminished. This meant, as historian Michael Smith has written, that: 'the House of Commons exerted an influence over the Upper House and the monarchy that made it the most powerful branch of government in nineteenth-century Britain'.

### The importance of the Reform Act

Many years after it was passed, the 1832 Act came to be known as the 'Great Reform Act'. It earned this title from Whig historians who looked back from the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, after further parliamentary reform had been passed, and saw the Act paving the way towards the development of a fully democratic system of government. But that was to read history backwards. The last thing the Whigs wanted was democracy. If anything, Earl Grey and his ministers brought in reform to save the country from the 'evils' of democracy.

When Grey formed his Cabinet in 1830 he said that he wanted to show 'real capacity [ability] in the landed aristocracy' and he appointed one of the most aristocratic governments of the whole nineteenth century. Yet some members of the Cabinet were ardent supporters of reform and had been so for a long time. Others, however, were more cautious. Nevertheless, most agreed that the parliamentary system needed 'purifying', with the removal of the worst and most blatant abuses. An obvious target was the rotten and pocket boroughs. Also, there had to be some recognition of the importance of industry and the demands of the new middle classes to be given some political power.

The Act may have been quite limited in its contents, but then it was not intended to lead to radical changes. Many aspects of the old system, some of them quite corrupt and unfair (certainly to us in the twenty-first century), were preserved but that was what the Whigs intended. The middle classes were taken into partnership with the landed classes and detached from their working-class allies. The middle classes did not take political power: they remained junior partners, as the Whigs had intended. The working classes stayed outside the political nation, again as intended. The Whigs achieved what they set out to do and they were well rewarded. In the first election after the Reform Act, they secured a majority of 308 in the House of Commons.

The Tories were right about some things. Sir Robert Peel had said the Act would not turn out to be 'final', as the Whig minister Lord Russell had said it would be. There was to be more parliamentary reform in 1867. But that was a generation away. Meanwhile, the Whigs had achieved the settlement of 'a great constitutional question', which they had set out to do.

The way the Act was passed was dramatic, involving a general election, stubborn resistance from the Lords, rioting, massive demonstrations, the threat of civil war and pressure on the king to force the Lords to give way. The details of the bill were, perhaps, less important than the fact and the manner of its passing. As the MP John Bright said: 'It was not a good bill though it was a great bill when it passed.'

# Parliamentary reform and the development of political parties

The 1832 Reform Act required that all those entitled to vote should have their names entered on an electoral register before they could cast their vote. This gave a huge spur to party organisation as local Whigs and Tories tried to ensure that all their supporters were registered. The local parties also challenged the claims of their opponents' supporters (for example, 'Did they have the right property qualifications?'). Recognising the importance of registration, the Tory Carlton and the Whig Reform Clubs were formed in 1832 and 1836, respectively.

Local party agents were appointed in the larger constituencies and politics became more professional. In these ways, the Reform Act contributed to the development of more modern, organised political parties.

# The emergence of the Conservative and Liberal parties The emergence of the Conservatives

One politician who clearly recognised the increased need to manage elections after 1832 was Peel. In 1834, when he became Tory Party leader, he issued what has become known as the **Tamworth Manifesto**. It was an open letter to the electors in his constituency of Tamworth but it was written with a wider audience in mind and was released to the press. In the Manifesto, Peel attempted to show the newly enfranchised middle classes that the Tories had moved on and were no longer the weak and backward-looking party they seemed to be in 1832. In it, he said: 'I consider the Reform Bill a final settlement' – that is, he accepted it. He also said that, in the 'spirit of the Reform Bill', he was willing to consider the 'correction of proved abuses and the redress of real grievances'.

It was also at this time that the term 'Conservative' came to be used to refer to Peel's party. In effect, the Tory Party was being given a new image. In the Manifesto, Peel promised to reform abuses but he was also keen to show that he would conserve 'established institutions' like the Church of England.



#### Tamworth Manifesto

A letter, addressed to Robert Peel's Tamworth constituents in 1846, in which he set out to show that the Tories were willing to accept and initiate reform.

Conservative This term came into use at the time of the Tamworth Manifesto when Peel promised that he would conserve the nation's institutions. Nevertheless, the term 'Tory' continued to be used as well.

For a few months in 1834–5, Peel headed a Conservative government. However, in February 1835, the Whigs held a meeting with Irish Catholic MPs (Catholics had been eligible to stand for Parliament since 1829 – see page 14) and a small number of radical MPs in which they agreed to unite and defeat the Conservatives in Parliament. This was the so-called **Lichfield House Compact**. The Whigs and their allies now had a significant majority and Peel was forced to resign in April 1835.

Despite this setback, Peel and his party were returned to power after the election of 1841. It was the first occasion on which a government (the Whigs) with a parliamentary majority was defeated in an election by an opposition party (the Tories).

### The formation of the Liberal Party

Peel's Conservative government set out to tackle the poverty and hardship of the early 1840s and, by 1843, had brought about considerable economic recovery. Then, in 1846, Peel and his Cabinet introduced a bill for the repeal of the Corn Laws (see page 64). It split the Conservative Party, many of whose members believed the Corn Laws were vital to the prosperity of agriculture and that they were a symbol of aristocratic rule. To these people, Peel was a traitor. The bill was passed but only with Whig support because two-thirds of the Conservatives voted against the measure. About 100 MPs stayed loyal to Peel and became known as 'Peelites', distinct from the two main parties, Whigs and Conservatives. Peel himself withdrew from politics and died in 1850.

With party loyalties in a state of flux, it is not surprising that there were nine separate governments from 1848 to 1868, many of them being coalition governments drawn from different groups. The number of Peelites declined over time as some died and others chose to leave the Commons. Eventually the few Peelites who remained moved towards the Whigs and, in doing so, helped to create the Liberal Party. In 1859, at a meeting in London, a number of Peelites, Whigs and some radical politicians agreed to form an anti-Conservative alliance in order to defeat the Conservative government. While some historians see this meeting essentially as an anti-Conservative move (like the Lichfield House Compact), others see it as the key moment in the foundation of the Liberal Party.

## Parliamentary reform in the 1850s

In the generation following the 1832 Reform Act, there was little concerted demand for further parliamentary reform from MPs. In the late 1830s and the 1840s, the Chartists (see Chapter 5) campaigned for major changes, such as votes for all men and annually elected Parliaments, but the propertied classes, those who were represented in Parliament, were strongly opposed to the kind of sweeping changes that would lead to democracy.



#### **Lichfield House Compact**

A meeting of Whigs, Radicals and Irish MPs held at the house of Lord Lichfield in February 1834. They agreed to form an alliance to defeat Peel's Conservative government.

**Peelites** The name given to Conservatives who supported Peel over the repeal of the Corn Laws.

## Coalition government

Government made up of members of more than one party.

#### Abolition of MPs' property qualification 1858

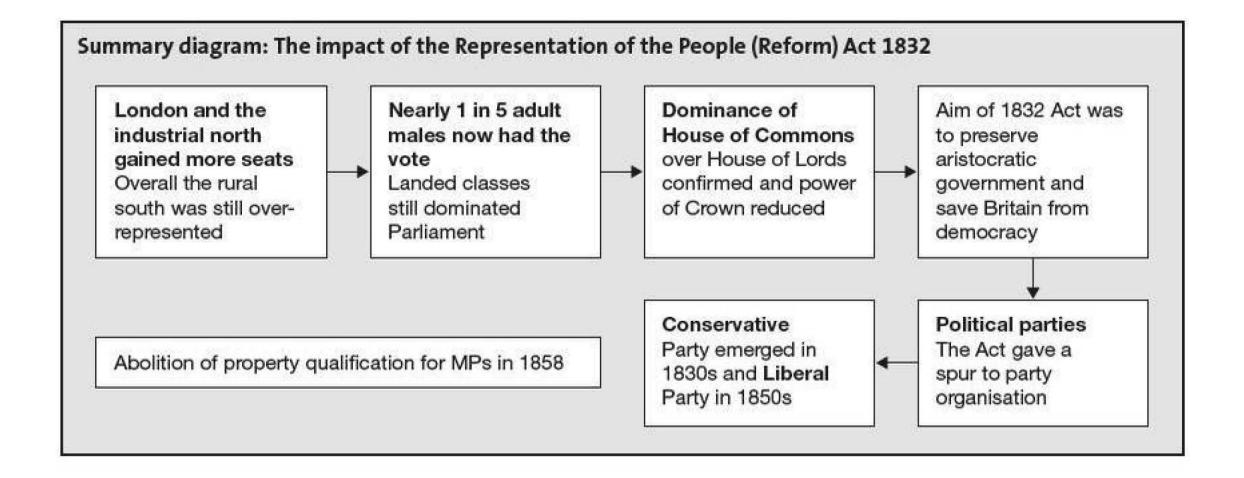
However, one of the Chartists' demands (see page 79), the abolition of the property qualification for MPs, was achieved in 1858. This meant that someone standing for election to Parliament no longer had to own property. However, in the absence of salaries for MPs, it remained difficult for someone without a private income to become an MP.

In the 1850s, a number of bills for parliamentary reform were introduced into Parliament. They were more concerned with the redistribution of seats than with widening the franchise and increasing the number of voters. One of the main reasons for this was that, with increasing prosperity and gentle inflation more men acquired the property qualification which was required to vote: by the 1850s, there were about 300,000 more voters on the electoral registers. Also, with increasing industrialisation and the growth of large cities, half the borough voters (as opposed to county voters) were, by the mid-1850s, represented by just 30 MPs while the other half, living in less densely populated boroughs, was represented by 300 MPs.

Yet despite these obvious reasons for reform, none of the bills introduced in the 1850s was passed. Britain was increasingly prosperous. In the middle years of the century, Britain became the most stable, the richest and the most powerful nation on earth. Many of those living in **Victorian Britain** accepted the reformed electoral system as settled by the 1832 Act. They were more concerned with efficient, cheap government than further parliamentary reform.



Victorian Britain Britain during Queen Victoria's reign from 1837 to 1901.



## Chapter summary

The demand for parliamentary reform grew from the 1780s. In the 1820s it came especially from the urban, middle classes and, in 1829-30, was accompanied by splits in the Tory Party, largely caused by Catholic Emancipation, and the emergence of political unions. When the Tories were defeated in Parliament in 1830, the new king, William IV, invited Earl Grey to form a government. The Whigs introduced a Reform Bill in March 1831. They believed that reform would prevent revolution and conserve the political system. The first bill was defeated in the House of Commons while rejection

1832 in a climate of increasing extra-parliamentary agitation and with the king coming under pressure to create new Whig peers.

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reged, The middle classes were largely enfranchised by the Reform Act, although the landed classes continued to dominate both Parliament and government. For the next 30 years, most Cabinet ministers came from the landed aristocracy. The dominance of the House of Commons over the Lords was confirmed, as was the declining influence of the monarchy. The Act settled the whole question of parliamentary reform for a generation.

The Act encouraged the development of Whig and Tory party organisation, especially in order to win elections. In the 1830s, the Conservatives emerged, as did the Liberals in the 1850s.



## Refresher questions

Use these questions to remind yourself of the key material covered in this chapter.

- I Why was there increasing demand for parliamentary reform in 1829-30?
- 2 What kind of reform did Lord Grey want?
- 3 What arguments were made by opponents of reform?
- 4 How and why did Grey warn the Lords of the dangers of rejecting reform?
- 5 What effect did the riots of autumn 1831 have on the government and its supporters?

- 6 Why did the Whigs need the support of the king?
- 7 What difficulties did Wellington have in forming a government?
- 8 How effective was the threat of mass resistance in 1831-2?
- 9 What were the most significant changes introduced in the 1832 Reform Act?
- 10 To what extent did the landowning classes still dominate Parliament after the passing of the 1832 Reform Act?
- II Why and how did the 1832 Reform Act lead to the development of political party organisation?



## Question practice

#### **ESSAY QUESTIONS**

- 1 To what extent were the Whigs' motives for introducing the Reform Bill essentially conservative and anti-democratic?
- 2 How far do you agree that the reform of parliamentary representation in 1832 was driven primarily by pressure from those excluded from the franchise?
- 3 'The Representation of the People (Reform) Act of 1832 transformed the British political system.' How far do you agree with this statement?
- 4 'The Representation of the People (Reform) Act 1832 enhanced the predominance of the House of Commons and diminished the power of the Crown and aristocracy.' To what extent do you agree with this statement?

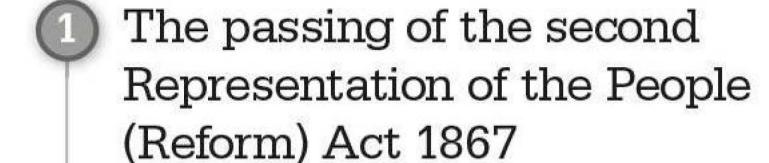
# Parliamentary reform and its impact 1860–1928

This chapter examines further parliamentary reform, particularly extension of the franchise, the distribution of parliamentary seats and the conduct of elections. It also assesses the impact of reform on political parties, the changes made to the powers of the House of Lords and the role of the monarchy in Victorian Britain. It examines these developments through the following themes:

- ★ The passing of the second Representation of the People (Reform) Act 1867
- ★ The impact of the second Representation of the People (Reform) Act
- ★ The third Representation of the People (Reform) Act 1884-5
- ★ The Parliament Act 1911
- ★ The Representation of the People (Reform) Act 1918

## Key dates

1867	Second Representation of the People	1909	'People's Budget'	
1872	(Reform) Act Ballot Act	1911	Parliament Act	
1883	Corrupt and Illegal Practices Prevention Act	1918	Representation of the People (Reform) Act	
1884–5	Third Representation of the People (Reform) Act	1928	Representation of the People (Equal Franchise) Act	



Why was the second Reform Act passed?

## Enfranchising the 'respectable' working class

By the early 1860s, some party leaders, especially in the governing Liberal Party wished to increase the number of voters, especially if it brought political advantage for their party. Above all, they wished to enfranchise the 'respectable'



#### **KEY TERM**

**Residuum** Literally something left behind, the residue.



#### **KEY FIGURE**

#### William Gladstone (1809–98)

Became a Tory MP in 1832. A Peelite, he moved to the Liberals in the 1850s and was chancellor of the exchequer 1852–5 and 1859–66. He later had four spells as prime minister (1868–74, 1880–5, February to July 1886 and 1892–4).

On what grounds, according to Gladstone in Source A, should a man be excluded from the vote? working classes. Victorians became increasingly concerned about the idea of 'respectability'. For most, it meant the ability to hold down a job and pay rent regularly; often it was associated with church attendance and literacy. Most of all it meant being sober and careful with money.

The 'respectable' working classes were contrasted with the 'residuum', the people who were seen as unskilled, casually employed, if at all, and who spent their money on drink and who didn't (or couldn't) save for a rainy day. Even if they were not actually criminal, these were seen as the 'dangerous classes'. This may have been a crude, unfair kind of stereotyping but the distinction was felt to be real and it was accepted by many in the working classes. After all, respectable working people, unlike the property-owning classes, could not afford to live apart from the 'dangerous classes'. The decline in mass protest after the failure of Chartism persuaded many politicians that respectable working men could, and should, be entrusted with the vote. The Liberal leaders believed that there was a 'safe' top layer of working-class town dwellers who had earned the privilege of the right to vote.

#### The 1866 Liberal Reform Bill

In the early 1860s the issue of parliamentary reform was simmering away at a low level but there was no great demand for it, either within Parliament or outside. Britain was increasingly affluent and comfortable without parliamentary reform. Yet, another Reform Act was passed in 1867. A number of factors explain this.

First, and probably most important, the prime minister, Lord Palmerston, who had been strongly opposed to reform, died in 1865 and was replaced, as both Liberal Party leader and prime minister, by Earl Russell. Russell had been a supporter of parliamentary reform since the 1830s and he believed that the respectable working classes, the skilled craftsmen and artisans in the urban boroughs, would vote Liberal.

A second factor was that **William Gladstone**, the increasingly popular star of the Liberal Party and likely to be its next leader, had been converted. In 1864, he told Parliament:

#### SOURCE A

From a speech by William Gladstone in Parliament on 11 May 1864, quoted in Eric Evans, *Parliamentary Reform*, c.1770–1918, Longman, 2000. Gladstone was chancellor of the exchequer in the Liberal government.

Every man who is not presumably incapacitated by some consideration of personal unfitness or of political danger, is morally entitled to come within the pale of [be included in] the Constitution. Of course, in giving utterance to such a proposition, I do not recede from the protest I have previously made against sudden, or violent, or excessive or intoxicating change. What are the qualities

which fit a man for the exercise of a privilege such as the franchise? Self-command, self-control, respect for order, patience under suffering, confidence in the law, respect for superiors. . . . I am now speaking only of a limited portion of the working class. . . .

It has been given to us of this generation to witness ... the most blessed of all social processes; I mean the process which unites together not the interests only but the feelings of all the several classes of the community, and throws back into the shadows of oblivion those discords by which they were kept apart from one another. ... I know of nothing which can contribute to that union, to the welfare of the commonwealth ... than that hearts should be bound together by a reasonable extension ... among selected portions of the people, of every benefit, and every privilege that can justly be conferred on them.

Gladstone believed that there was a significant number of self-disciplined, respectable working men who had earned the privilege of being granted the vote and could safely be enfranchised.

A third factor was increasing external support for reform, especially from the mid-1860s. In 1864, the largely middle-class Reform Union was founded in Manchester by a group of wealthy merchants, manufacturers and businessmen. Then in 1865, the Reform League, mainly organised by skilled workers, was formed. Both organisations favoured widening the franchise and they worked together, thus contributing to the growth of popular pressure for parliamentary reform.

How were the respectable working class to be defined? As historian Eric Evans has commented, one could hardly devise a 'respectability questionnaire' to decide who deserved the vote. The only criterion, for the Victorians, was property owning. So, in March 1866, Gladstone introduced a bill in the House of Commons (Russell was a member of the Lords) which would lower the borough franchise from £10 to £7 householders. The bill also changed the county franchise. In total, the electorate would have been increased by less than half a million. Yet even this moderate proposal met implacable opposition from within Liberal ranks, particularly among the aristocratic, old Whigs. They were unconvinced by the arguments about respectability. They saw the working class as irresponsible, likely to demand higher taxes to pay for more social reform and, therefore, not to be trusted with the vote.

The leaders of the Conservative Party, Lord Derby, in the Lords, and **Benjamin Disraeli**, the leader in the Commons, now saw their opportunity. They did all they could to exploit and widen the split in the Liberals. With his party divided and his bill under attack, Russell resigned in June and the Conservatives formed a government. Here was a make-or-break opportunity for the Conservatives to pass a Reform Bill of their own and to portray themselves as a party that *could* govern. They had been in opposition for most of the last twenty years so, if



#### **KEY FIGURE**

#### Benjamin Disraeli (1804-81)

Conservative chancellor of the exchequer in 1852 and again 1858–9, he became prime minister in 1868 and 1874–80; regarded as the founder of modern Conservatism. they could pass a bill, they might earn the gratitude of the newly enfranchised electors at the next election and establish themselves in power for some years. The problem was that they were in a minority in Parliament. They would have to win over some Liberal supporters of reform in order pass a bill. Disraeli calculated that convinced Liberal reformers could be persuaded to support a bill, especially with growing outside support. It would certainly be a gamble.

#### The role of extra-parliamentary pressure

It was at this stage that external pressure suddenly made itself felt. The failure of the Liberal bill led to a demonstration in London's Hyde Park which, although banned by the authorities, went ahead anyway and led to violence and the tearing down of some of the park railings. There were also street demonstrations and protest meetings in several cities. The threat of widespread or escalating violence was nothing like as great as it had been in 1831–2. However, this extra-parliamentary pressure did create a climate in which some kind of reform became more necessary.

#### The Conservative Reform Bill

Derby and Disraeli knew that, when they introduced a reform bill, they would have to *appear* to offer more than the Liberals. So they proposed a wholesale householder suffrage in the boroughs, with no financial barriers (like the £7 householder franchise proposed by the Liberals). This was certainly radical but they then hedged this qualification round with safeguards. For instance, it was necessary to have lived in the property for two years: many working men moved frequently between rented properties. They also proposed to introduce so-called 'fancy franchises' which would give an extra vote to those with professional qualifications, like doctors and lawyers, or a university degree: this would have diluted the impact of an increased working-class electorate.

However, the greatest safeguard against urban elections being swamped by working-class voters was that only those who paid rates (local taxes) directly to the local authorities, as opposed to paying them through their landlords as part of their rent, would be eligible to vote. In effect, this would restrict the electorate more than the £7 householder franchise would. This was, nevertheless, too much for some Conservatives, and three ministers resigned from the Cabinet: they were horrified at the prospect of rough, poorly educated working men electing MPs.

In steering the bill through the Commons, Disraeli had two main aims: to ensure the outcome was a Conservative, not a Liberal, bill; and to block any amendment proposed by Gladstone and his allies. No doubt, Disraeli also hoped that a Tory reform would pave the way for him to succeed Derby as party leader.

He was helped by the fact that most Conservatives were desperate to stay in power and many MPs did not understand the technical details of the franchise. Also, party discipline at this time was still fairly weak and many MPs could be counted on to vote according to their consciences rather than as told to by their leaders. Disraeli would certainly need these factors in his favour because nearly all the safeguards proposed in the initial Conservative bill were to be swept away.

Over the next three months, Disraeli completely outmanoeuvred and outwitted Gladstone. He turned down amendments proposed by Gladstone but accepted ones proposed by more radical members of the Liberal Party. For instance, he accepted the reduction in the residence qualification for borough voters to one year. He also abandoned the idea of creating 'fancy franchises'.

#### Hodgkinson's amendment

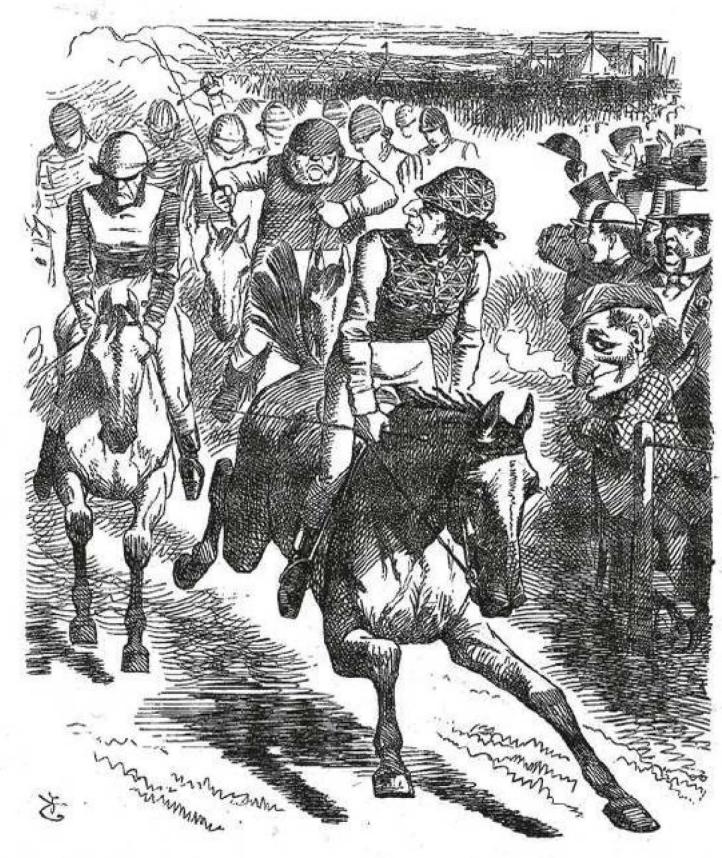
However, by far the most radical amendment, proposed by a radical backbench MP called Grosvenor Hodgkinson, was to abolish the difference between those who paid their rates directly to the local authorities and those who paid indirectly. Most MPs did not grasp the significance of this change but it effectively added 400,000 voters.

At the end, the bill, which had been hastily prepared, bore little resemblance to what had first been proposed and was far more radical than any would have expected. Furthermore, few, if any, could have foreseen how the change would work out in practice. It was, as Derby later said, 'a leap in the dark'. Disraeli's performance had been dazzling. He had given the impression of being in calm control when he was being rushed into improvisation and concession. He had kept in close touch with his Conservative backbenchers, convincing them that defeat would lead to the dissolution of Parliament and to a general election which the Liberals would probably win, leaving the Conservatives out in the political wilderness again. In a letter to a friend, he explained that accepting Hodgkinson's amendment was 'a step which would destroy the present agitation and extinguish Gladstone and Co.'.

In the Lords, where there was no widespread support for reform, Derby worked skilfully, exploiting divisions among the Liberals and rallying his supporters to ensure the passing of a Conservative bill. The final bill was the outcome of party-political manoeuvring within Parliament on which external pressure had limited impact. A radical bill was the price to be paid for the Conservatives holding on to power, for the defeat of Gladstone and the Liberals and for Disraeli's emergence as certain successor to Derby as Conservative leader.

#### **SOURCE B**

Study Source B. What point is the cartoonist making? How accurate do you think his judgement is?



Disraeli, portrayed as a jockey, steers his horse to the head of the parliamentary race in a *Punch* cartoon of 1867.

THE DERBY, 1867. DIZZY WINS WITH "REFORM BILL."

MR. PUNCH. "DON'T BE TOO SURE; WAIT TILL HE'S WEIGHED."

# Summary diagram: The passing of the second Representation of the People (Reform) Act 1867

#### 1866 Liberal bill to enfranchise 'respectable' working classes

- Caused split in Liberal Party
- · Led to formation of a minority Conservative government

#### Second Representation of the People (Reform) Act 1867

- Steered through House of Commons by Disraeli
- Was more radical than intended or expected by Conservatives
- Was a political triumph for Disraeli



# The impact of the second Representation of the People (Reform) Act



► How radical was the 1867 Reform Act?

The passing of the second Reform Bill was characterised by Disraeli's opportunism and political calculation. The result caused misgivings among many in Parliament, both Conservative and Liberal. Yet the response to it in the country was enthusiastic. One newspaper hailed it as 'The Triumph of Reform'.

However, Disraeli, who succeeded Derby as prime minister in February 1868, was not rewarded with electoral victory in the general election of autumn 1868. The Liberal victory sent a clear message: in the boroughs, where the Conservatives incurred a net loss of 33 seats, the newly enfranchised working men seemed to be decidedly Liberal. The 'leap in the dark' produced a bleak outlook for the Conservatives. However, they won 60 per cent of the county seats and scored some notable victories in London. In one borough, the wellknown intellectual John Stuart Mill was defeated by the newsagent W.H. Smith, whose name still adorns many high streets in Britain. Furthermore, in 1874, the Conservatives achieved victory in the general election. In that election, they were dominant in the London suburbs and the southeast generally, as well as in the English counties, a pattern which has been repeated ever since.



#### **KEY TERM**

**Suburbs** Areas of mostly middle-class, residential housing on the outskirts of cities. Living in the suburbs, while working in the urban areas, was made possible by the development of the railways.

## Who was enfranchised by the 1867 Reform Act?

In the boroughs, the vote was granted to:

- · Men owning, or occupying, houses if resident for at least one year.
- Lodgers who paid £10 in rents if resident for a year.

In the *counties*, the vote was granted to:

- Men owning, or having leases on, land worth £5 a year.
- Men occupying land with a rateable value of £12 a year and who paid poor rates.

## Change and continuity after 1867

The changes in the franchise had been hastily put together but the redistribution of seats had been carefully planned by Disraeli and, as intended, it favoured the Conservatives. Although the disenfranchisement of many smaller boroughs and the award of more seats to the larger boroughs may have been to the Liberals' advantage, the counties, which generally returned more Conservatives to Parliament, gained more seats. Furthermore, the redrawing of constituency boundaries was carried out by a Conservative-dominated commission which extended the boundaries of many boroughs so that there was a reduction in the number of urban, and predominantly Liberal, voters in county seats. The counties thus remained more solidly Conservative.

One clear element of continuity was the over-representation of the rural areas relative to the industrial and of the south and west of England relative to the rest of the country. For example, the southwest of England had 45 MPs, yet the northeast, with three times the population, had only 32.

Similarly, the social composition of MPs changed little. Less than a quarter of those elected in 1874 came from commercial or industrial backgrounds. The proportion of middle-class professionals such as lawyers increased but landowners continued to dominate Parliament and they still held nearly all the county seats.

The greatest change brought about by the second Reform Act was the increase in the numbers who were enfranchised, a far bigger increase than there had been in 1832. The number of English voters grew from 1.2 million to nearly 2 million. Instead of one in five males being able to vote, one in three could now do so. There were now far bigger electorates in many northern towns and cities: in Leeds, for instance, the electorate increased fourfold. In several urban constituencies, the majority of the electorate was now working class. For many, like those in the Reform League, the respectable working man had finally received his just reward.

However, Britain was far from being a democracy. Two out of three adult males still had no vote. In the boroughs, the following were still excluded:

- those without a one-year residence qualification
- most adults living with their parents (as only one person per household could vote)
- lodgers who paid rent of less than £10 a year
- those receiving poor relief.

In the counties, the agricultural labourers, who constituted the majority of the rural population, did not have the vote.

## The development of party political organisations

Despite the fact that still only a third of adult males could vote, the increase in the size of the electorate, especially in the urban boroughs, led to a transformation of party political organisation in towns and cities. Many party associations or clubs were formed in order to identify, encourage and win over new voters. Initially, the Conservatives were the more active of the two main parties. Under the leadership of John Gorst, a Conservative Central Office was set up in London. This body provided guidance to a wide network of local party associations which were grouped into the National Union of Conservative and Constitutional Associations. By 1877, the National Union had 791 local associations affiliated to it.

Defeat in the 1868 election had provided much of the impetus for increased Conservative activity in the constituencies. Similarly, electoral defeat in 1874 spurred the Liberals on to improve their party organisation and the National Liberal Federation was founded in 1877. Both of the main parties employed paid local agents to recruit and retain new members while many social activities were organised to attract them. One of the most successful local party organisations was built up in Birmingham by the local leading Liberal, Joseph Chamberlain. He devised a system for enlisting new members, keeping accurate lists of who they were and ensuring they voted on election day. This efficient form of organisation was called the **caucus** by some of its critics but it certainly helped to secure victory for many Liberal candidates in the West Midlands in the 1880 general election.

Now that there was a much wider electorate, politicians had to be more responsive to public opinion This was not just a consequence of the second Reform Act. There had been a huge increase in the number of newspapers, particularly provincial ones, since the 1830s. Reasons for this included:

- increasing literacy
- the development of the steam press, which printed papers quickly and cheaply
- · the telegraph lines, which transmitted news rapidly
- the railways, which distributed papers.

However, the increase was particularly marked after 1867. Then, as now, the press reflected public opinion but it could also be used by politicians to convey their message. Both Liberals and Conservatives recognised that the future of governments would now be determined as much by the electorate as by political events in Parliament.

#### SOURCE C

The Salford Weekly News reports on a meeting of the Broughton Liberal Club in February, 1872, quoted in Michael Willis, Britain, 1851–1918, Hodder Murray, 2006.

It was further intended, if the funds were forthcoming, to erect a commodious [spacious] billiard room, which would be replete with every convenience, and contain a full-sized table. This, combined with a reading room, smoke room, chess, draughts, a good supply of papers and periodicals, and the opportunity for obtaining tea, coffee, cigars etc., at fixed charges on the premises would, it was confidently hoped, offer such advantages as should induce all Liberals of the district to enrol themselves as members.

The very different views of Gladstone and Disraeli, the two giants on the political stage in the 1870s, were presented to the electorate by the press. Party politics became a national passion.

Party organisations also became more conscious of 'image'. Early photographs and drawings show politicians as authoritative and wise. The Primrose League was named after Disraeli's favourite flower and was particularly successful in winning Conservative support among women. Women did not have the vote but they could undoubtedly influence the voting habits of their menfolk.



**Caucus** A term originating in the USA to mean a group or meeting of members of a political party.

What light does Source C throw on the development of local political organisations?

Elections after 1867 were more about informing electors of party policy, less about deciding which individual was best suited to represent the constituency. This change was not necessarily a direct result of parliamentary reform but it was certainly an effect of more thorough, professional, party organisation. Furthermore, loyalty to agreed party policies and to the party leadership was expected of MPs if they wished to continue to receive support from the party. All of this, and not least the expense of running local and national party organisations, reinforced the dominance of the two-party system.

#### The Ballot Act 1872

Although, after 1867, the number of uncontested elections decreased, there remained a number of 'pocket boroughs'. Many of the smaller boroughs were strongly influenced or even effectively controlled by local landowners. This explains why the majority of the 54 English boroughs of less than 10,000 inhabitants were predominantly Conservative in 1868 and 1874. A smaller number of county seats are reckoned to have remained in the gift of a patron. This is one of the main reasons for the passing of the Ballot Act by the Liberals in 1872.

Radicals and reformers had long campaigned for an end to open voting, which took the form of a public declaration made at the polling station. They believed that voting in secret would prevent the influencing, bribery and intimidation of voters by interested parties such as employers and local landowners. (The secret ballot had also been one of the 'six points' of the Chartists, see page 79.) There was considerable opposition to the secret ballot. Even the veteran parliamentary reformer Earl Russell supported the open declaration of support for a particular candidate or party. It was seen by many in Parliament as an honourable, manly tradition and voting secretly as somehow cowardly.

Gladstone, prime minister since 1868, recognised that secrecy was more likely to guarantee independent voting and reduce the influence of the landlord over the tenant. The secret ballot might also make newly enfranchised working-class men less susceptible to bribery or other pressure from their employers. The passing of the Act certainly led to less rowdy, violent elections which was more in keeping with sober, respectable Victorian middle-class values. However, bribery did not go away. Some said, not completely flippantly, that the only difference the secret ballot made was that electors could now take bribes from both sides since the candidates did not know who a particular voter was going to vote for. The general election of 1880 was to be the most expensive to date. Not until 1883 was the practice of bribery more effectively controlled.

## The Corrupt and Illegal Practices Prevention Act 1883

The realisation that a much increased electorate did not reduce electoral corruption led to more concerted pressure for action to be taken, especially when it became clear that the secret ballot made little difference. Bribery, of course, was not the only form of influence which continued to have an impact on election results. A combination of loyalty and continuing fear was probably

significant, too. For example, most tenant farmers in the county seats seem to have been as loyally Conservative as their landowners so that little pressure was needed. Similarly, in some industrial boroughs, loyalty to a well-established employer often determined the outcome of elections.

After the 1880 election, reported by officials to have cost about £2 million (more than a billion pounds today), three factors persuaded Parliament to act:

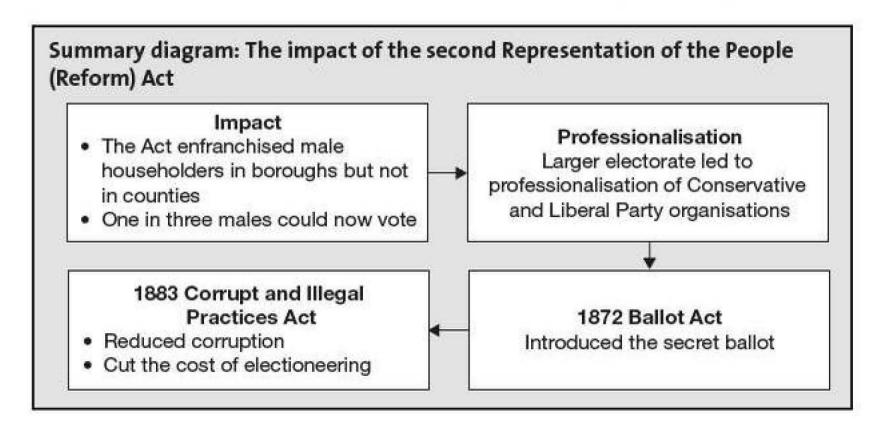
- There was a desire for respectability.
- The cost of elections deterred working-class candidates, and even some less affluent middle-class ones, from standing. This, in turn, meant that Parliament might continue to be dominated by men of leisure which many, particularly in the Liberal Party, saw as idle landowners.
- Even for the wealthy, the costs of electioneering were spiralling out of control.

A special commission set up after the 1880 election found a level of corruption that shocked MPs. For example, in Gloucester, it was reported that 38 per cent of the 5670 electors had accepted bribes. Reports like this helped Gladstone to make reform a cross-party issue and to reach broad agreement on the need to limit election expenses and define exactly what corrupt practice was.

The Corrupt and Illegal Practices Prevention Act was passed in 1883. Its main terms were:

- It restricted each candidate to one paid election agent whose responsibility it was to produce an official report of election expenses.
- It specified the maximum expenditure allowed for constituencies of different types, for example, for a county seat of 2000 voters, it was £710 (£380,000 today), with an extra £40 for each additional 1000 voters.
- It prescribed penalties, including imprisonment, for corrupt practice.

The Act was effective. The number of petitions presented to Parliament alleging corruption or illegal practice dropped markedly and the average spent per vote polled fell from 18s. 8d. (94p) in 1880 to 3s. 4d. (17p) in 1910. Political parties now came to rely more on volunteers than on paid election workers and this has continued to be a characteristic feature of elections to the present day.





**Cross-party** Involving two or more political parties.



## The third Representation of the People (Reform) Act 1884-5

Did the third Reform Act make England a democracy?

The second Reform Act of 1867 had enfranchised all householders in the boroughs but not in the counties. Within a few years, most politicians recognised that it was only logical to extend the household franchise to the countryside. Gladstone, who was prime minister again after the 1880 general election, certainly believed that, if the urban working classes were respectable enough to have the vote, then so, too, were agricultural and rural workers. Many of his more radical supporters were keen to extend the vote to the latter, confident that they would vote Liberal. Surprisingly, one group of rural workers who had been excluded from the vote were coal miners: many of them lived and worked in mining villages, especially in the northeast, which were situated within county seats. They were now clamouring for the vote.

Lord Salisbury, leader of the Conservatives since Disraeli's death in 1881, was wary of extending the franchise. A member of the landed aristocracy, he did not wish to see landowning influence in the county seats diluted by an enlarged electorate. However, he was astute enough to see that extending the franchise might not be a disaster for the Conservatives if they could shape the redistribution of parliamentary seats. When the first Liberal Electoral Bill was rejected in 1884 by the Conservative-dominated House of Lords because it did not bring with it a Redistribution Bill, Gladstone decided to go for a bill with cross-party support. The radical Liberal MP Charles Dilke and Lord Salisbury himself took charge of working out the redistribution of parliamentary seats.

There was less external pressure than in 1867 and none of the heated parliamentary debate there had been in 1866-7. The eventual outcome was the third Reform Act of 1884-5. It was actually made up of two distinct pieces of legislation. One was to extend the franchise, the other to redistribute parliamentary seats. Both had smooth passages through Parliament because they had cross-party support.

#### The extension of the franchise 1884

The franchise was extended to all householders in the counties and to lodgers who paid £10 a year in rent. This added nearly 2.5 million, mostly rural, voters so that about 80 per cent of the adult male population was now qualified to vote. Although this may have looked like a step towards democracy, it was qualified by the practice of 'plural voting'. For example, graduates of Oxford, Cambridge and London universities could vote in the constituencies of those universities, which had their own seats in Parliament. An even more significant number were those who had an occupational voting qualification; for instance, those

who lived in a county constituency could also vote in the neighbouring borough constituency if they owned occupational (business) premises there. This meant that about seven per cent of the population had more than one vote.

#### The Redistribution Act 1885

- Boroughs with populations of less than 15,000 lost their parliamentary seats.
- Two-member borough constituencies with fewer than 50,000 people lost one of their seats.
- About 150 seats released for redistribution were transferred to the more densely populated counties like Lancashire and Yorkshire and to the evergrowing cities.
- The wider London area, with a population of over 3.5 million, went from 22 seats to 62.

This far-reaching redistribution reflected the huge growth of urban centres and their suburbs. Salisbury managed to influence the redrawing of constituency boundaries in such a way that many new, distinctly suburban constituencies were created out of the big towns and cities. The majority of the electorate in these constituencies were property-owning middle classes who were often alarmed by radical elements in the Liberal Party and the increasing power of the trade unions and thus keen to defend security and preserve stability. They could be relied on to elect Conservative MPs. Nowhere was this more marked than in London where, in subsequent elections, the Conservatives won most of the seats. As recently at 1865 they had won none at all!

## The development of democracy

In 1885, the Liberal politician Joseph Chamberlain wrote: 'government of the people by the people ... has at last been effectively secured'. Many of his contemporaries saw it that way too. They could point to the fact that many agricultural workers and coal miners were among the almost 2.5 million men who could now vote for the first time. The majority of the electorate was now working class. Furthermore, nearly all constituencies were to be single-member seats and they were more equal in size of population: the electoral map of 1885 looked more like today's than that of 1832.

However, in 1884–5, as in 1867, many men were still excluded:

- those who did not have a one-year residence qualification, which ruled out many men who moved about in search of work
- sons living with their parents
- servants who lived in their employers' houses
- those receiving poor relief, which included many of the elderly
- soldiers living in barracks and most sailors.

Furthermore, many failed to have their names added to the electoral register, which was necessary in order to be able to vote. The process was long and

complex, daunting for those who were illiterate. At the end of the nineteenth century, only 95 constituencies were reckoned to have working-class majorities (at a time when most of the population was working class) and, in 1914, Britain had one of the most restrictive franchises in western Europe.

These limits to the democratic nature of the electorate made it difficult for a working-class party to emerge in Parliament. Also, although the redistribution of seats was considerably fairer than it had been, it was still weighted against the working classes. Rural areas and the south of England were still over-represented while the north was under-represented. Furthermore, although property qualifications for MPs had been abolished in 1858 (see page 32), election expenses, even after the 1883 Act, were still considerable; for instance, candidates were expected to pay their local party agent. The fact that MPs were still unpaid deterred working-class men from standing for Parliament as well as being yet another reason for the continuation of uncontested elections. From 1880 to 1910 an average of twenty per cent of elections were not contested.

Despite these curbs on the development of democracy, the reforms of 1884–5 undoubtedly made party organisation and national campaigns more important. Both of the main parties continued to develop a national network of clubs and associations as they had to cultivate support among a far larger electorate. Furthermore, much of that electorate was now better informed thanks to the rapid growth in the newspaper-reading public. In the early twentieth century, the *Daily Mail* and, later, the *Daily Mirror*, sold a million copies a day.

They did not report politicians' speeches in full, like the more traditional *Daily Telegraph*, but they gave summaries and reached far more people.

### The decline in power of the landowning class

The third Reform Act undoubtedly speeded up the decline in political power and influence of the landowning aristocracy. This was caused by the reduction in the number of rural seats and the enlargement of the county electorate, which severely reduced the influence of landowning patrons. The number of landowning Cabinet ministers and MPs continued to decline: after the 1885 election, MPs from industrial and commercial backgrounds outnumbered landowners in the House of Commons for the first time. Even in the Conservative Party, most new MPs after 1885 were from middle-class families. After 1885, the electoral system was dominated by city and suburban interests. This change had been taking place gradually over the course of the century but it was, nevertheless, a massive change in the type of people who held power.

In conclusion, the third Reform Act undoubtedly made Britain more democratic. There was now a much larger electorate and it was much less amenable to 'influence'. Yet still there was a common assumption that the vote was not a right to be granted to all adults but, rather, something to be earned by some

mark of respectability and responsibility which, in late nineteenth-century Britain, was the male headship of a household. Most Victorians believed that if everyone could vote there would be a 'tyranny of the masses'. 'Democracy' was almost a term of abuse: it meant election by the uneducated, incompetent many.

### The emergence of the Labour Party

The enfranchisement of many more working-class voters was one of the main reasons for the emergence of 'Lib-Lab' MPs. These were working-class ('Labour') MPs who were part of the Liberal Party but voted independently on specifically working-class or trade union issues. Typically, they represented heavily working-class constituencies such as coalmining areas. Because MPs were unpaid, such MPs were usually salaried trade union leaders: two were elected in 1874, thirteen in 1885. Then, in the early twentieth century, an independent labour party was to emerge.

The term 'Labour Party' was first used in the late 1880s. In the 1892 general election, Keir Hardie, an ex-miner and trade union official, and two other men were elected as independent Labour MPs. The next year, the Independent Labour Party (ILP) was formed. In the early years of the ILP, several of its leaders were recent converts from the Liberal Party, many of them disillusioned with the Liberal Party's reluctance to accept working men as parliamentary candidates. One of them was Ramsay MacDonald who, 30 years later, was to become the first Labour prime minister.

Many ILP members were also trade unionists. For them, forming their own parliamentary party was the best way to protect themselves against the powerful employer organisations and their supporters in the Liberal and Conservative parties. They tended to be practical men, more interested in achieving specific aims, such as the introduction of old-age pensions and the eight-hour day, rather than in developing revolutionary theories of class struggle. Keir Hardie, for one, even insisted that the term 'socialist' should not appear in the name of the party, arguing that 'labour' was of broader appeal and more likely to win supporters.

In 1900, the Labour Representation Committee (LRC) was formed specifically to support 'a distinct Labour group in Parliament'. By 1903, over 100 trade unions had joined the LRC and Keir Hardie had achieved what had always been his main aim: a vital link had been forged between the parliamentary representation of working people and their trade unions.

In those heavily working-class constituencies where the LRC hoped to be successful, their main rivals for the workers' vote were the Liberals. The Liberals, who had lost the general elections of 1895 and 1900 to the Conservatives, were well aware that the LRC could split the working-class vote in many constituencies. Both Liberal and Labour parties saw the advantages of an electoral agreement not to contest key seats. In 1903, the two parties reached



#### KEY FIGURE

#### Keir Hardie (1856-1915)

Born the illegitimate son of a Scottish servant-girl. He had been a Liberal but lost faith in the party because of what he saw as its lack of support for striking Scottish miners. He became convinced that it was essential for the workers to be represented by an independent labour party.



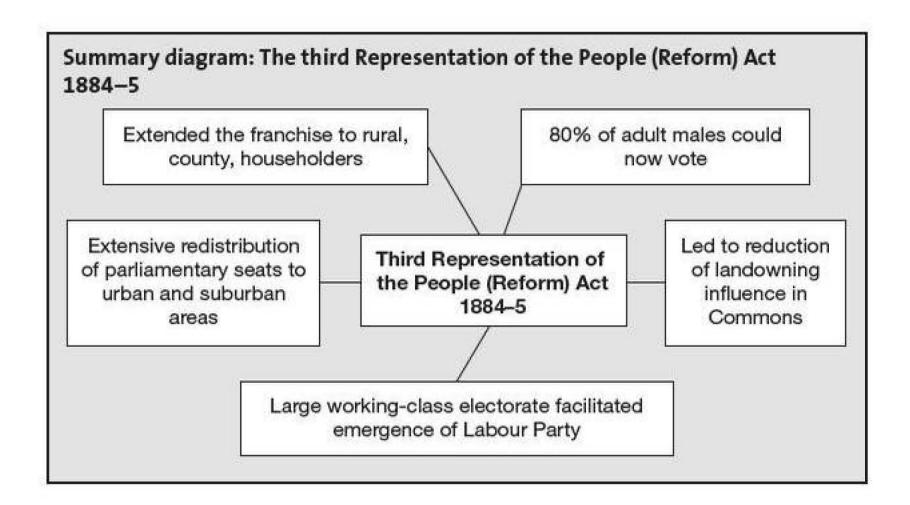
#### **KEY TERMS**

Independent Labour Party (ILP) A political party founded in 1893 to promote working-class interests.

Socialist One who advocates State control of parts of the economy and greater social equality.

Labour Representation Committee (LRC) A body formed to improve the lives of working people through parliamentary action. It later became the Labour Party.

agreement: under this 'Lib-Lab Pact', the Liberals agreed not to contest a number of seats at the next general election. In return, the successful LRC members of Parliament would support an elected Liberal government. In the event, the LRC gained greatly from the pact and 29 of its candidates, including Keir Hardie and Ramsay MacDonald, were elected in 1906. On entering Parliament, these MPs renamed themselves the Labour Party.





## The Parliament Act 1911

Why and to what extent were the powers of the House of Lords reduced in 1911?

At the start of the twentieth century, the most pressing issue concerning parliamentary reform was the demand for female suffrage (see Chapter 7). However, for a brief period from 1909 to 1911, the question of reform of the House of Lords became highly controversial.

Throughout the nineteenth century there had been a large Conservative majority in the House of Lords. However, there had also been an informal, unwritten agreement between the political parties about the use of the Lords' powers:

- The peers would not reject 'money bills' (budgets) passed by the elected House of Commons.
- They might make amendments to others' bills.
- They retained the right to reject bills for constitutional change.

In 1910–11, this unofficial agreement broke down and brought about a constitutional crisis.

The Lords had rejected several Liberal bills over the previous 50 years and, more significantly, had recently defeated two bills passed by the Liberal government which had been elected with a huge majority in 1906. One of these bills was to end the practice of plural voting whereby some, usually richer, men could vote in more than one constituency. In 1907, the Liberal government proposed to limit the powers of the House of Lords but no action was taken. Then, in 1911, a political crisis brought the issue to the forefront of politics.

## The 'People's Budget' 1909

In April, David Lloyd George, the chancellor of the exchequer, introduced a radical budget. In order to pay for the expansion of the navy and old-age pensions, he proposed to increase taxation of the wealthy. This was the first budget to introduce graduated taxes, ones which fall more heavily on the rich. Income tax was to be increased (for highest earners) but most controversial was the proposal to impose a twenty per cent tax on the unearned increase in the value of land when it was sold. This, and other, new taxes on land appeared to target a particular privileged group, the landed classes. Perhaps Lloyd George, known to be an opponent of inherited wealth, relished a confrontation of 'peers versus people'.

When it looked likely that the Lords might reject what was becoming known as the 'People's Budget', Lloyd George went on the offensive and attacked the peers in a speech.

#### SOURCE D

From a speech by Lloyd George in Newcastle, October 1909, quoted in Robert Pearce and Roger Stearn, Government and Reform: Britain, 1815–1918, Hodder & Stoughton, 1994.

Let them realise what they are doing ... The question will be asked: 'Should 500 men, ordinary men, chosen accidentally from among the unemployed, override the judgement – the deliberate judgement – of millions of people who are engaged in the industry which makes the wealth of the country?' That is one question. Another one will be: 'Who ordained that a few should have the land of Britain as a perquisite [right], who made 10,000 people owners of the soil and the rest of us trespassers in the land of our birth?

The leaders of the Conservative Party, in both the Commons and the Lords, agreed that the budget should be defeated in the House of Lords. They knew this defiance would be unpopular, especially as the Liberals had a huge majority in the Commons, but they argued that this was not an ordinary money bill: it constituted an attack on the rights of landed property and was thus unconstitutional. Therefore, the electorate should have a say before the Lords let it pass. The Conservatives reckoned they might gain seats in Parliament in an election as the Liberals had been losing recent by-elections. The Conservatives might even secure an electoral victory over the Liberals.



#### KEY FIGURE

#### **David Lloyd George** (1863 - 1945)

Born into a Nonconformist Welsh family, he was chancellor of the exchequer 1908-15 and prime minister 1916-22.

What criticisms of the Lords is Lloyd George making in Source D?

## 0

#### **KEY FIGURE**

#### Winston Churchill (1874–1965)

Had been a Conservative MP before becoming a Liberal in 1904. He returned to the Conservatives in 1924 and became chancellor of the exchequer. He was prime minister 1940–5 and 1951–5.

#### The Parliament Bill 1911

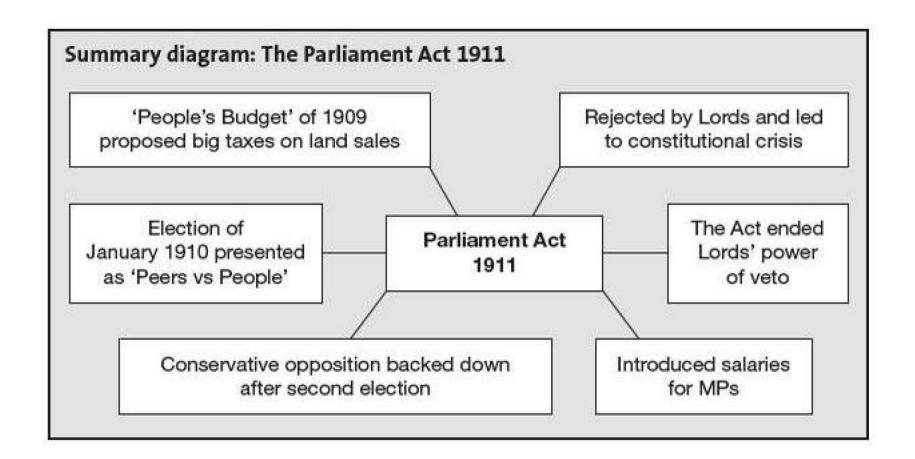
In November 1909, the Lords rejected the budget by a huge majority and a general election was held in January 1910. The government presented the Lords' actions as a case of the selfishness of a privileged class and the election as an issue of 'Peers versus People'. Some in the Lords argued that they were resisting an act of 'class war'. The election result was very close but it still delivered a Liberal victory. The Conservatives accepted their defeat and the budget was passed. Now the Liberals introduced a bill to limit the powers of the House of Lords. A minority of Liberals wanted to abolish the House of Lords. Some, like **Winston Churchill**, who was home secretary in the Liberal government, preferred an elected second chamber (although he himself came from an aristocratic background). In the event, the Parliament Bill was quite moderate: it prevented the Lords from rejecting or even amending a money bill (to be defined by the speaker of the House of Commons) but allowed the unelected upper house to delay other legislation for up to two years. How would the Lords respond?

The bill made slow progress in Parliament, partly because Edward VII died in 1910, and the government did not want to involve the new, inexperienced king, George V, in a constitutional struggle in which he might have to play a central part. A cross-party constitutional conference was established to arrive at a compromise. It dragged on and failed to arrive at a settlement so that, after a few months, George V found himself in the same position in which William IV had been in 1832. In other words, the new king was asked to create enough new peers to pass the bill if the Lords rejected it. George V agreed, on two conditions: that the government seek the opinion of the people by holding another election; and that his agreement to create new peers be kept a secret.

The general election, held in December 1910, aroused little interest in the constitutional issue itself and the result was almost identical to that in January. Although some Conservative 'last-ditchers' refused to give way and voted to reject the bill, most followed the advice of their leaders and abstained. The bill was passed in July 1911. The outcome meant that the Lords retained their power to delay a bill passed by the Commons for up to two years although they could not amend or defeat a money bill. The Parliament Act also reduced the period between elections from seven to five years, which meant that the Lords could defeat bills introduced during the last two years of a government's term of office. However, their composition was unchanged: the House of Lords remained wholly unelected with the principle of hereditary succession intact. (The issue of House of Lords' reform was still not resolved in the early twenty-first century.)

#### Payment for MPs

The Parliament Act also introduced salaries for MPs. This meant that working men could afford to give up their jobs and become MPs. They no longer had to be sponsored by a trade union or political party. In the years ahead considerably more working-class men were to be elected to Parliament, particularly after 1918 (see page 54).





# The Representation of the People (Reform) Act 1918

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What was the impact of the Representation of the People Act 1918?

The extension of the franchise to all men and most women in 1918 was the result of a patriotic consensus, not a popular campaign in the country or a struggle between the main political parties in Parliament. It grew out of a recognition of the wartime sacrifice made by 'our soldiers'. In 1916, a few months before he became prime minister, Lloyd George wrote that the soldiers 'have a right to a voice in choosing the Government that sends them to face peril and death.' Ideas about respectability that had excluded 40 per cent of males from the vote after 1884 now seemed petty.

The case for women's suffrage, which had been agreed on by many in Parliament, if not the political leaders, before the war, was now recognised as fully justified. Millions of women had shown as much patriotism as the men in their commitment to the war effort: they had worked as nurses, in the munitions

factories and offices and on the farms. Many MPs no doubt also feared a revival of suffragette militancy (see page 118) when the war ended if women were not granted the vote.

However, the cross-party group which was set up in 1916 to work out the details of parliamentary reform believed that many of the men in Parliament would support female suffrage only if the majority of those women were married. It was thought they would be more mature, more likely to add stability to a society that had lost so many men in war. For this reason, it was decided that women had to be aged 30 or over to be able to vote. They also had to be householders or married to householders. All men over 21, together with those aged nineteen and over who were on active service, were to be enfranchised. The Representation of the People Act which enacted these provisions was passed in February 1918, nine months before the end of the war.

The redistribution of seats ensured that nearly all parliamentary constituencies were single-member seats and were of roughly equal size. Redistribution helped the Conservatives, as it had done in 1867 and 1884, by creating more suburban, primarily middle-class, constituencies. It is thought that the number of seats dominated by the middle-class electorate rose from 48 to almost 200 in 1918. The Act also created many more coalmining constituencies, which were to be the heartland of Labour Party support. The number of seats in which miners made up at least 30% of the electorate rose from 35 to 55.

This Act did not produce complete universal suffrage because:

- it left women under 30 without the vote
- in the general election of December 1918, about five to seven per cent of adult males were unregistered
- also, there was still some plural voting, which was significantly reduced but it was not finally abolished until 1948.

Nevertheless, the impact of war made Britain far more democratic. This, the fourth Reform Act, gave the vote to more people than all previous reform acts put together. It trebled the size of the electorate by enfranchising 5 million men and 8 million women.

## Impact of the 1918 Act on the political parties

The Act of 1918, together with the war, had a dramatic impact on party politics. In enfranchising millions of working-class men, it undoubtedly gave a boost to the electoral fortunes of the Labour Party: in the general election of December 1918, Labour's share of the vote rose from 7 to 22 per cent and its number of seats from 42 to 60. Of the 57 Labour MPs elected in 1918, all were working class in origin and 49 were sponsored by trade unions. Three-quarters of Labour MPs elected in the interwar years had received only an elementary education (usually up to the age of 13).

Electoral reform was a significant factor in Labour's replacing the Liberal Party as the main 'progressive' party. However, Labour's advance was also helped by the split that occurred in the Liberal Party in 1916 between those Liberals who supported Asquith and those who supported Lloyd George. The 'Asquith' and the 'Lloyd George' Liberals were not to be reunited until 1923 but, by then, great damage had been done to the party and the split never really healed. The Labour Party was also helped by the fact that Lloyd George headed a coalition government with the Conservatives after the 1918 election and was therefore constrained by his Conservative coalition partners from adopting some more radical measures. Another significant factor in Labour's rapid rise was the wartime growth of trade union membership, from 4 million to 6 million, which meant more trade union funds for the Labour Party to fight elections. So dramatic was the surge in electoral support for the Labour Party that, in 1924, it was able to form a government.

Nevertheless, despite the rise in support for the Labour Party, the Conservatives were the most successful party in the 1920s, either in coalition with Lloyd George or in government on their own. They were in office for most of the decade. This is explained partly by the split in the opposition between Liberal and Labour but also by the split within the Liberal Party. However, the Conservatives were also very successful in recruiting and involving women in the party organisation, particularly at local level, and in electioneering. Despite a Liberal recovery in the 1923 general election, the post-war era was to be dominated by the Conservative and Labour parties, not by Conservatives and Liberals.

The Representation of the People (Equal Franchise) Act, which finally gave the vote to women on the same terms as men (that is, at the age of 21), was passed in 1928.

## The decline in the power of the monarch

The decline in the monarch's right to appoint a prime minister was largely a result of parliamentary reform and the growth of political parties. It became very noticeable after the Reform Act of 1832 (see page 28). Over 30 years later, in 1867, Walter Bagehot, a political journalist, argued in his book, *The English Constitution*, that: 'the sovereign has three rights – the right to be consulted, the right to encourage, the right to warn'. In other words, the monarch could advise but that advice might not necessarily be followed. Queen Victoria largely took Bagehot's words as guidance, as did her successors.

In 1880, when the Liberals won the general election, Queen Victoria wished to appoint the official leader of the Liberal Party, Lord Hartington, as prime minister in preference to Gladstone, whom she disliked. However, the Liberal Party was determined to see Gladstone as prime minister and the queen had to give way. This was further confirmation that the right to appoint the prime minister had passed from the Crown to the political parties. British monarchs may have resented the limits imposed on their power but the monarchy survived.

#### Summary diagram: The Representation of the People (Reform) Act 1918 Representation of the People (Reform) Act 1918 · Impact of war impelled Britain into becoming a democracy Representation of · All men, and women aged over 30, were the People (Equal enfranchised Franchise) Act 1928 5 million men and 8 million women were granted Enfranchised women the vote aged over 21 Labour Party emerged in 1920s as main opposition to Conservatives

Chapter summary

aristocratic, landowning influence in Parliament and contributing to the emergence of the Labour Party.

Lloyd George's budget of 1909 led to a constitutional crisis, the outcome of which was a reduction in the power of the House of Lords in the Parliament Act of 1911. Before the end of the First World War, there was cross-party support for the enfranchisement of all adult men and for most women. It was felt that the franchise had been earned by their commitment to the war effort. Finally, in 1928, all women were given the vote under the same terms as men.



## Refresher questions

Use these questions to remind yourself of the key material covered in this chapter.

- I Why did parliamentary reform become an important political issue after 1865?
- 2 Why were the Conservatives so determined to pass a measure of parliamentary reform in 1866-7?
- 3 Why did the Conservatives pass such a radical Reform Act in 1867?
- 4 What impact did the 1867 Reform Act have on the development of the Conservative and Liberal parties?
- 5 Why was the Ballot Act passed in 1872?
- 6 What was the impact of the Corrupt and Illegal Practices Prevention Act of 1883?
- 7 Why was the third Reform Act passed in 1884–5?

- 8 In what ways was the 1885 Redistribution Act. favourable to the Conservatives?
- **9** Why did the decline in political power of the landowning classes speed up after 1885?
- 10 How do you account for the emergence of the Labour Party after 1885?
- II Why did the House of Lords' rejection of the 1909 budget lead to a constitutional crisis?
- 12 By how much were the powers of the House of Lords reduced in the Parliament Act of 1911?
- 13 In what ways was the 1918 Representation of the People Act so far-reaching in its effects?
- 14 Why did the Labour Party grow and the Liberal Party decline after 1918?
- 15 How did the power of the monarchy decline in the nineteenth century?



## Question practice

#### **ESSAY QUESTIONS**

- 1 To what extent was the second Representation of the People (Reform) Act 1867 the key turning point in the development of political parties in the years 1790-1928?
- 2 'In the years 1815-1928, the reform of parliamentary representation was primarily driven by pressure, from those excluded from the franchise.' How far do you agree with this statement?
- 3 'The Parliament Act of 1911 led to the most significant change in the relationship between the House of Commons and the House of Lords in the years 1815–1928. How far do you agree with this statement?
- 4 How far do you agree that the third Representation of the People (Reform) Act of 1884–5 was the key turning point in the development of democracy in England in the years from 1790 to 1928?

# Radical reformers 1780–1819

This chapter will examine the impact of the French Revolution on British politics, especially the growth of radical politics. The end of the subsequent wars with France in 1815 led to several years of hunger, unemployment and a wave of popular protest. These topics are examined in this chapter through the following themes:

- \* Radical reform in the time of the French Revolution
- ★ The effects of the war with France
- ★ The growth of popular radicalism 1815–19
- ★ The government response to radical protest

Key date:	5			
1789	Outbreak of the French Revolution	1815		Corn Laws
1790	Burke's Reflections on the Revolution in France	1816–17		Harsh winter; national petitioning campaign
1791–2	Paine's The Rights of Man	1816	Dec.	Spa Fields meeting
1792	London Corresponding Society formed	1817		Suspension of habeas corpus Government ban on large meetings
1792-5	Legislation to suppress the threat of		June	Pentridge rising
	radicalism	1819	Aug.	'Peterloo massacre'
1815	End of war with France			The Six Acts



# Radical reform in the time of the French Revolution

How great a threat did radical reformers pose in the 1790s?

The French Revolution, which erupted in 1789, had a dramatic impact on British political life. The poet William Wordsworth wrote, 'Bliss was it in that dawn to be alive, But to be young was very heaven!' However, many in the governing classes were more restrained in their response. Some of them thought, rather

patronisingly, that the French were at last catching up with the British and might establish a constitutional monarchy with an elected Parliament. The French Revolution certainly caused widespread debate.

In November 1790, Edmund Burke published a book entitled *Reflections on the Revolution in France*. Burke was not opposed to reform but he was appalled by the violence that, in his view, accompanied revolutionary change in France. In his book, he maintained that government derived its authority from custom and tradition, not from the consent of the governed. He celebrated rule by monarchy and aristocracy and felt that its overthrow would lead to the kind of anarchy which he saw in France.

#### **SOURCE A**

# From Edmund Burke, Reflections on the Revolution in France, first published in 1790, quoted in the Penguin edition, 1986, p. 111.

The people of England ... look upon the legal hereditary succession of their crown as among their rights, not as among their wrongs; as a benefit, not as a grievance; as a security for their liberty, not as a badge of their servitude. They look on the frame of their commonwealth, such as it stands, to be of inestimable value; and they conceive the undisturbed succession of the crown to be a pledge of the stability and perpetuity of all the other members of our constitution.

## Tom Paine and The Rights of Man

Although Burke was highly critical of events taking place in France, many were excited by developments like the **Declaration of the Rights of Man** and the abolition of privilege. There were numerous responses to Burke's book but by far the most popular and influential was *The Rights of Man* by **Tom Paine**. Part I was published in February 1791 and Part II in April 1792. Paine applauded the changes taking place in France. He dismissed Burke's insistence on the need to follow tradition and on the role of the monarchy and the aristocracy. He wrote that Burke 'pities the plumage but forgets the dying bird'.

#### **SOURCE B**

# From Tom Paine, The Rights of Man, first published in 1791, quoted in Eric Evans, Parliamentary Reform, c.1770–1918, Longman, 2000, p. 96.

There never did, there never will, and there never can, exist a Parliament, or any description of men, or any generation of men, in any country, possessed of the right or the power of binding and controlling posterity to 'the end of time'. ... Every age and generation must be as free to act for itself in all cases as the ages and generations which preceded it. ... I am contending for the rights of the living ... and Mr. Burke is contending for the authority of the dead over the rights and freedom of the living.

#### KEY TERM

Declaration of the Rights of Man A document outlining the rights of citizens in France.

For what reasons, according to Burke in Source A, do the 'people of England' support hereditary monarchy?

### **KEY FIGURE**

#### Tom Paine (1737-1809)

Born in Norfolk, he later emigrated to America and supported the colonists' demand for independence from Britain. Returned to Britain in 1787 but was forced to flee (to France) soon after the publication of *The Rights of Man*. He died in America.

How would Paine, quoted in Source B, defend his assertion that Burke is 'contending for the authority of the dead over the rights and freedom of the living'?

Paine opposed rule by an aristocracy who exist only for 'idle luxury' and he referred to the 'puppet show' of hereditary monarchy and aristocracy. He railed against unearned privilege and inherited wealth. He advocated sweeping reforms to improve the lives of working men and women. For instance, he called for free education for all and pensions for the elderly. Above all, he called for universal manhood suffrage so that all men, not just the rich or property owners, had the right to vote for their MP. Only then, he said, would ordinary working men get elected and have the opportunity to pass laws through Parliament that would benefit them.

This was revolutionary material. Most alarming, to the governing classes, was the fact that the book was sold cheaply and became a bestseller: 200,000 copies of Part II were sold within a year. Many of the skilled working classes were literate and, even if they could not read his work, many working men and women heard passages read out in pubs, clubs and in their homes. These were not the kind of people traditionally involved in political discussion. No longer was political debate limited to the propertied classes.

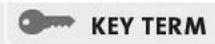
## The London Corresponding Society (LCS)

The French Revolution revitalised the movement for parliamentary reform in Britain. More than that, it stimulated the demand for far more radical reform such as that advocated by Paine. In January 1792, the **London Corresponding Society (LCS)** was formed. It held weekly meetings and discussed the poverty and high prices faced by working people. However, it also adopted a political programme to deal with their grievances. It called for universal manhood suffrage, the secret ballot and the payment of MPs (so that working men could afford to give up their jobs and would not need a private income if they were elected). None of these ideas was new. Some had been aired in the 1770s and 1780s. What was new, and worried the government, was the social composition of the society. It was led by a shoemaker, Thomas Hardy, and most of its members were skilled working men, craftsmen and small traders. Many were angry and impatient because of their exclusion from the political life of the nation.

Of yet more concern to the government, and to the propertied classes generally, was the fact that many more such societies were formed in cities across the country and that, as their name suggested, they corresponded with each other. Furthermore, they corresponded with groups in revolutionary France. They printed and disseminated pamphlets and, at the height of their influence, in the mid-1790s, they could call several thousand people out on to the streets for a demonstration.

## The loyalist backlash

Opposition to the radicals was not long in coming. Many people, especially among the propertied classes, sprang to the defence of the existing system of



London Corresponding Society (LCS) Set up to campaign for manhood suffrage and to correspond (write to and make links) with other reforming groups.

government. When the French overthrew the monarchy and, then, in January 1793, executed the king, most Britons were horrified. French violence was contrasted with British stability and prosperity. So-called 'loyalist' associations, with government backing, were formed and they attracted widespread support. Loyalist propaganda appealed to the traditional hatred of France, with whom Britain had fought two wars in the previous 30 years, and exploited public fear of radical change. A concerted campaign of anti-radical propaganda was launched in newspapers, pamphlets and cartoons. One correspondent in the Manchester Mercury urged action to 'crush those insidious vipers who would poison the minds of the people'.

### The government response

In the 1790s, despite much evidence of loyalist support, the government became increasingly afraid of the growth of radical societies and the upsurge of popular unrest. Reports from local magistrates and informers reinforced the fear of a revolutionary conspiracy. A series of measures were passed to counter the threat:

- In May and December 1792, proclamations against seditious writings were issued. Their main target was Tom Paine. These authorised the government to make use of spies as well as more conventional methods such as opening letters and infiltrating radical groups.
- In 1794, 41 radicals, including Thomas Hardy, were arrested and charged with high treason. However, after Hardy was acquitted, further trials were abandoned.
- From May 1794 to July 1795, habeas corpus was suspended. This enabled the authorities to round up suspects and detain them indefinitely without trial.
- In 1795, when the radical threat was at its highest and unrest was inflamed by harvest failure, food shortages and high prices, the Treasonable Practices and the Seditious Meetings Acts were passed. The former made words, either spoken or written, not just actions, treasonable: its aim was to intimidate and no radical was ever prosecuted under it. The latter prohibited meetings of more than 50 people without the approval of a magistrate.

#### The decline of the radical threat

By the end of 1795, radicalism was largely silenced. Government policy was a success. Its new powers did not need to be used often and fewer than 200 people were convicted in the 1790s. What made the legislation particularly effective was the threat that it hung over the radicals. It enabled the authorities to intimidate and harass their opponents, to arrest their leaders and silence their propaganda. Many were frightened into abandoning the movement.

However, the collapse of the radical threat is not only explained by Pitt's 'reign of terror'. Once war had broken out between Britain and France in early 1793, patriotic feeling in Britain led many to view the radicals as traitors, even as enemy agents working to destabilise Britain. Far more people joined loyalist

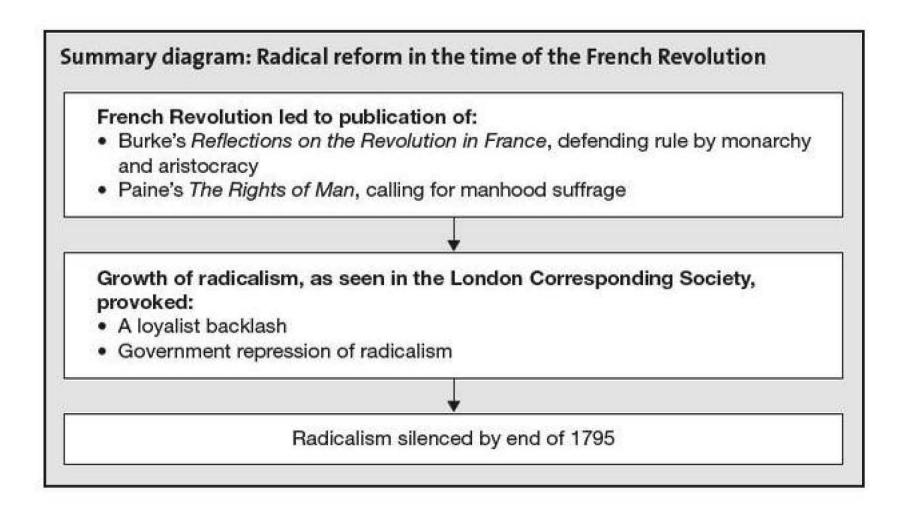


#### KEY TERMS

Seditious Using language encouraging rebellion against the State.

Habeas corpus A Latin phrase meaning 'you have the body'. The law of habeas corpus said that anyone arrested had to be charged with an offence and brought before a court. The government resorted to the suspension of habeas corpus again, in 1817.

associations than radical societies: at its height, the LCS had no more than 5000 members while Loyalist associations far outnumbered radical societies. The revival of patriotism had the effect of dampening down enthusiasm for radical reform. Pitt's policies were accepted by the propertied classes, who felt most threatened by popular radicalism, and also by many working people. Nevertheless, although radicalism quietened down, it did not disappear. It went underground and it reappeared again before the end of the war against France.





# The effects of the war with France

Why did the end of the war lead to hardship and discontent?

#### Luddism

In the 1800s, when the threat of invasion receded, the campaign for reform slowly began to be revived. But something quite new also emerged: in 1810–11 there were reports of men with blackened faces attacking factories and mills by night. These reports came from the industrial towns and villages of Nottinghamshire, Lancashire and Yorkshire. Most of the attacks were on mills and factories that had installed new machines, especially in the textile industry, and it was often the new machines that were singled out for destruction. The perpetrators were mostly skilled men who still used traditional, hand-operated machinery for spinning, weaving and other processes. These craftsmen felt their jobs and livelihoods to be under threat from the new machines and from the

employment of more and more women and children to mind the machines in the new mills and factories.

The attackers were known as Luddites after a figure called Ned Ludd who was said to inspire and lead these men. He was portrayed as a kind of Robin Hood figure but it is unlikely that such a historical figure ever existed. Thousands of troops were stationed in the north and Midlands to counter the Luddite threat. Machine breaking was made a **capital offence**. After several executions and the return of better economic conditions, Luddite outbreaks petered out. But they had shocked the authorities.

The Luddite attacks were not politically motivated; they were not part of an organised campaign for political rights. However, when the war ended in 1815, things were to change and a nationwide, political agitation did emerge. Its aim was complete manhood suffrage so as to secure the vote for all adult men. Before we examine this new, radical campaign, we need to look more closely at the economic and political situation in Britain at the end of the war in 1815.

#### The end of the war 1815

Britain emerged from the war victorious. Yet it had been very expensive. To finance the war, the government had had to increase taxes. It had also borrowed a vast amount of money. This meant that the government would have to raise money in tax to pay the interest, let alone pay off the debt completely. In the years after the war, interest paid on these loans used up 80 per cent of government income.

During the war, the government had introduced a new tax, an income tax, which only the rich, for obvious reasons, paid. When the war ended, MPs reminded the government of its promise that income tax would only be temporary, a war-time measure. Most MPs now insisted that income tax be dropped and the government was forced to give way. Instead of this **direct** tax, Parliament now introduced new **indirect** taxes. These included taxes on everyday items like sugar, tea, soap, candles, beer and tobacco. They were collected indirectly, through the increased costs of these items. These taxes would hit the poor just as hard as the rich. In fact, they would hit the poor much harder since a much higher percentage of their income would be spent on these items.

On top of increased taxation came unemployment. Over 300,000 men returned from war service looking for work and, in those days, there were no pensions or allowances paid to war veterans as we might expect today. Furthermore, industries like textiles (producing army uniforms) and coal, iron and engineering (producing weapons) now found that government contracts dried up and so more workers were laid off. Even worse was to follow when the government decided to ban imports of foreign wheat.



Capital offence A crime which carried the death penalty.

Direct and indirect taxes
Direct taxes, like income
tax, were paid directly to the
State. Indirect taxes were paid
on goods as part of the price
paid when purchasing those
goods.

#### The Corn Laws 1815

During the war, Britain had had to rely almost exclusively on its own farmers to produce the wheat needed to make bread. Now, with the war ended, the landowners, who dominated Parliament, demanded a ban on imports of foreign wheat. They said that Britain needed to be self-sufficient in case of another war and because the population was rising so fast. They knew that hunger and famine had been one of the major causes of the French Revolution and were determined to avoid such a revolution in Britain. They also reminded Parliament that agriculture employed many more people than any other industry and claimed that hundreds of thousands of farmers (and farm labourers) could be out of work if Britain was flooded with cheap foreign wheat.

However, critics of the government saw it very differently. When the **Corn Laws** were passed in 1815, the Government's opponents said it was purely 'class legislation', passed by a landowning Parliament for completely selfish reasons. They accused Parliament of passing the laws simply to safeguard landowners' profits and rents. It was taxes like these that convinced many outside Parliament that they could never expect fairness and justice unless the system of elections to Parliament was completely changed. In other words, they would have to resort to political means in order to improve their living conditions.



Corn Laws Laws which imposed tariffs, or import duties, on foreign wheat. In fact, the import of wheat was banned until the price of British wheat reached 80 shillings (£4) a quarter (about 13 kg).

**'Class legislation'** Law or laws passed to favour one particular class, in this case the landed class.



# The growth of popular radicalism 1815–19

What was the impact of extra-parliamentary protest?

During the years from 1815 to 1819 radical agitation took three main forms. These were:

- the campaign in the press
- political clubs
- public meetings.

# The radical press

The first was the campaign in the press. The 'father' of all newspaper agitators was Major John Cartwright. A gentleman-farmer by background, he had been in the forefront of radical politics for 40 years. He argued that manhood suffrage had been guaranteed in Saxon times and had been lost at the time of the Norman conquest in 1066. In the early 1800s, he had spent months travelling in the Midlands, the north and Scotland to see for himself how these areas had been affected by economic hardship. He had worked hard to convert his listeners and readers to the cause of parliamentary reform and to establish links between reformers across the country.

# William Cobbett and the Political Register

The most widely read of all journalists was William Cobbett. Like Cartwright, he had also travelled thousands of miles round Britain, on horseback, in order to win support and learn more about living and working conditions. He produced a Weekly Political Register. When it was published as a short pamphlet for 2d. a week, it was read by thousands. And for every person who read it, there were many more who found out from friends, family or workmates what it said.

Cobbett had no doubt who was responsible for the people's suffering. He attacked the government and their hangers-on. In particular, he singled out the 'placemen' who received incomes, paid for from taxation, for the 'places' they held in government. He also attacked the government 'pensioners' who received money when they retired. He railed against the 'fundholders', those who had lent money to the government and lived off the income they received in interest. He said they were 'parasites' and 'taxeaters'. He accused the governing classes of being 'unproductive' and 'idle' and contrasted them with the 'industrious classes', the working men and women who starved so that the rich could live in luxury. He championed the cause of working people and he knew exactly where to lay the blame for the workers' suffering.

#### SOURCE C

#### From William Cobbett, Political Register, November 1816.

As to the causes of our present miseries, it is the enormous amount of taxes, which the government compels us to pay for the support of its army, its placemen, its pensioners etc. and for the payment of the interest of its debt. That this is the real cause has been a thousand times proved; and it is now so acknowledged by the creatures of the government themselves. The tax gatherers do not, indeed, come to you and demand money of you: but, there are few articles which you use, in the purchase of which you do not pay a tax.

The winter of 1816-17 was very harsh. There had been a poor harvest in the summer and bread prices rose higher than they had ever been before. Cobbett's arguments found an enthusiastic response among the working classes. It was



#### **KEY FIGURES**

# John Cartwright (1740 - 1824)

A radical reformer since the 1770s, he founded the Hampden Club (see page 66) in 1812.

# William Cobbett (1763 - 1835)

His Political Register was the most widely read radical journal in the years after 1815. To avoid arrest, he fled to America in 1817, returning in 1819. In 1832, he became the radical MP for Oldham. an industrial town in Lancashire.

Who and what is Cobbett blaming for 'our present miseries' in Source C? What type of tax is he condemning in the last sentence?

said that Cobbett's writings were being read in nearly every cottage in south Lancashire and the east Midlands in the winter of 1816–17. Samuel Bamford, a radical Lancashire weaver, wrote that Cobbett's 'influence was speedily visible; he directed his readers to the true cause of their sufferings – misgovernment; and to its proper corrective – parliamentary reform'.

# Political clubs

Many of Cobbett's readers attended meetings in pubs, chapels and cottages in these years: the radical club, where these people gathered, was the second form of agitation. The best known of these was the **Hampden Club** founded in 1812.

The club had been established by Cartwright and others in order to agitate for what was called a 'general suffrage'. They aimed to win over 'respectable' support for reform. Most 'respectable' people were far too afraid of radical ideas, fearing that they might lead to revolution, and not many joined. However, working men set up Hampden clubs in the industrial areas of Lancashire, Yorkshire and the Midlands. They were open to any man able to pay 1d. a week subscription. This money could then be used to finance the publication of pamphlets supporting manhood suffrage and the abolition of the Corn Laws.

In 1816–17, the Hampden clubs organised a petitioning campaign. The presentation of a petition to Parliament was a long-established and legal method of expressing public opinion. In hundreds of villages and towns, especially in the industrial areas of Lancashire, Yorkshire, the Midlands and central Scotland, meetings were held and signatures collected. All demanded reform of Parliament and most called for an end to the Corn Laws and for fairer taxes. Some of the strongest support was in Lancashire, where thousands of handloom weavers, threatened with the loss of their jobs, were at the forefront of the agitation. Villages and towns across the country held meetings and selected representatives to attend a nationwide meeting in London.

# Public meetings

The third form of radical agitation was the public meeting. This is most closely associated with the name of Henry Hunt (see profile opposite). Like Cartwright and Cobbett, he came from a farming background. Known as Orator Hunt because of his fiery speeches, he became a hero to the working classes. He had no interest in winning the support of 'gentleman reformers'. Instead, he looked to huge outdoor meetings, attended by 'members unlimited', to rouse the masses and provide a springboard for a rising. He did not want any riots: he believed that it was by being well organised, orderly and peaceful that the masses could demonstrate their newfound power and discipline. In the face



Hampden Club This was named after John Hampden, a harsh critic of the king's government at the start of the civil war in the seventeenth century.

# Henry Hunt

1773	Born			
1810	Imprisoned for assault			
1816	Spoke at Spa Fields meeting in London			
1819	Main speaker at St Peter's Field meeting in Manchester			
	Arrested, tried and imprisoned			
1822	Released from prison			
1830	Became MP for Preston			
	Founded the Metropolitan Political Union			
1833	Lost his seat in Parliament and retired from politics			
1835	Died			

Henry Hunt came from a prosperous Wiltshire farming family. As a young man he became involved in radical politics and, while in prison, he met William Cobbett. On his release, he campaigned for universal manhood suffrage and, in the years after 1815, he became the most prominent, and the most popular, radical leader. A folk hero, he was distinguished by his white top hat and his flamboyant personality. He was well known for his rousing speeches and thousands would walk for miles to hear him speak at big open-air meetings. He was the main speaker at the Peterloo meeting in Manchester in 1819 (see page 70); he was arrested and later imprisoned for two years for his part in the episode.

Hunt became MP for Preston in 1830. This was a 'popular' constituency, with a large electorate and, in the 1830 election, Hunt defeated the anti-reform, Tory candidate. He opposed the 1832 Reform Act (see page 22) because it did not grant the vote to working men.

of meetings of such huge numbers, the government would find it hard to resist the people's demands. This method was known as the 'mass platform': massive demonstrations, and the collection of thousands of signatures, for petitions to Parliament, would form the platform for putting irresistible pressure on Parliament to reform itself. The largest meetings were held in cities like Manchester, Birmingham and London.

# The Spa Fields meeting, London, December 1816

In December 1816, a huge meeting was held at Spa Fields in London. Henry Hunt was due to address the crowd. The atmosphere was like that of a carnival. People in their thousands poured into the city, whole families, clubs and communities, both from within the city and from outlying villages. There were banners and bands, market stalls and slogans. Before the meeting, leaflets were circulated among the crowd (see Source D, page 68).

Before Hunt arrived, a small section of the crowd rioted, breaking into gun shops, seizing weapons and marching towards the Tower of London. The riots lasted for several hours and there was looting. However, the majority of the people in the crowd were peaceful. They were also loyal and, when the band played the national anthem, thousands joined in the singing of 'God, Save the King'. When Hunt arrived, they heard him call for lower taxes and the reform of Parliament.

For what reasons does Source D suggest the authorities might be fearful of mass meetings?



**Regent** The future king, George IV.



# Lord Castlereagh, Robert Stewart (1769–1822)

A Tory government minister and leader of the House of Commons.

#### SOURCE D

#### From a leaflet at the Spa Fields meeting, London, December 1816

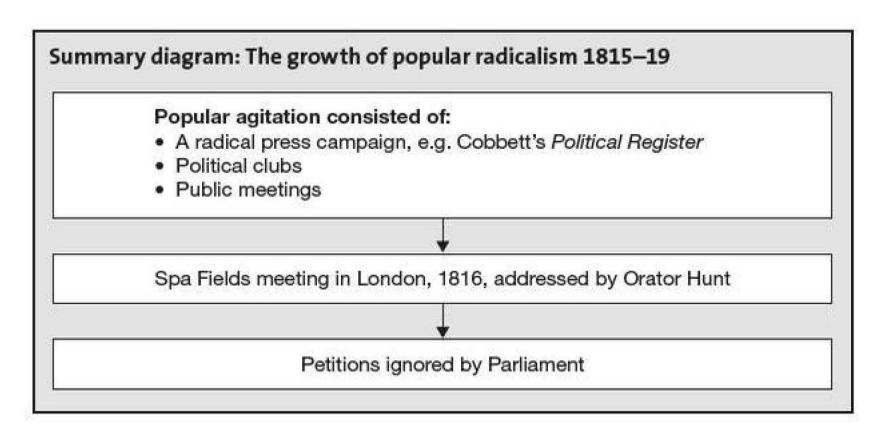
BRITONS TO ARMS!

THE WHOLE COUNTRY WAITS THE SIGNAL FROM LONDON TO FLY TO ARMS! HASTE, BREAK OPEN GUNSMITHS AND OTHER LIKELY PLACES to find arms! Run all constables who touch a man of us; no rise of bread; no Regent; no Castlereagh, off with their heads; no placemen, no taxes, no bishops.



Figure 4.1 A drawing showing placards at the Spa Fields meeting, December 1816.

In 1817, Parliament received over 700 petitions, some signed by thousands. Although there were a few radicals in Parliament and some members of the Whig Party were sympathetic, most MPs were afraid of this demonstration of popular feeling. They certainly did not want to grant the vote to all men. The petitions were ignored or dismissed.





# The government response to radical protest

How effective was the government's response to popular, extra-parliamentary protest?

The government knew that hunger and hardship motivated many of the demonstrators. The home secretary, Lord Sidmouth, had written to his brother in the summer of 1816: 'It is to the autumn and winter that I look with anxiety'. He knew that was when the effects of a bad harvest and a depression in trade would hit hardest. But the government also felt threatened. These demonstrations smacked of revolution, especially when they turned violent. When the Regent's coach was attacked soon after the Spa Fields riots, the government suspended the law of habeas corpus (see page 61). This meant that people could now be arrested and held without trial: they would not have to be charged with a specific offence or appear before a court. They could be arrested and imprisoned simply on suspicion of being revolutionary. In March 1817, Parliament passed an Act which made it illegal to hold a meeting of more than 50 people. These actions taken by the government became known as the 'Gagging Acts'.

With large meetings banned and habeas corpus suspended, the radicals were forced underground and into secrecy. The planning of large meetings and the co-ordination of their activities now became far more difficult. False names and secret codes were adopted. The government resorted to the use of spies and informers. These *agents provocateurs* would pretend to be agitators, join radical groups and encourage uprisings. They would help in the planning of such risings and then let the government know the details. In this way, the authorities would be ready to catch the rebels red-handed.

# The Pentridge rising, June 1817

The most famous government spy was known simply as 'Oliver'. He infiltrated a group of discontented workers in Derbyshire and led them to believe that, if they rose up and marched on Nottingham, their rising would be the start of a nationwide rebellion and they would receive support from many other parts of the country. On a rainy night in June 1817, about 200 men with pikes, forks and a few guns set off from Pentridge in Derbyshire to march to Nottingham. When they arrived in Nottingham, they were met by troops and rounded up. Following a trial, the leaders were hanged and 30 were **transported**. The trial and executions may have served as a deterrent to other agitators but the government's involvement led to a public outcry. The last words, uttered by one of the rebels on the scaffold, were: 'This is the work of the Government and Oliver'.



#### **KEY TERMS**

### Agents provocateurs

Men employed by the government whose job was to infiltrate radical groups and provoke them into taking actions which would lead to their arrest.

**Transported** Sent to a penal colony, often Australia.

# Peterloo, August 1819

In 1818, there was a slight improvement in trade, a fall in unemployment and, for a short time, some relief from the hardship of the previous two years. The law of habeas corpus was restored and the ban on large meetings was lifted. In 1819, four monster meetings were planned as a demonstration of radical, working-class strength. The last one was to take place in St Peter's Field, Manchester, in August.

Radical clubs and political unions from across Lancashire prepared for the big day. Some took part in military-style drilling before marching into Manchester. Whole families turned out in their 'Sunday best', their best clothes, keen to take the opportunity to hear Orator Hunt, 'the intrepid champion of the people's rights', as he was known in the north. There were brass bands and, when the marchers heard the national anthem played, 'the people for the most part took off their hats', according to one eyewitness. There were probably over 60,000 present.

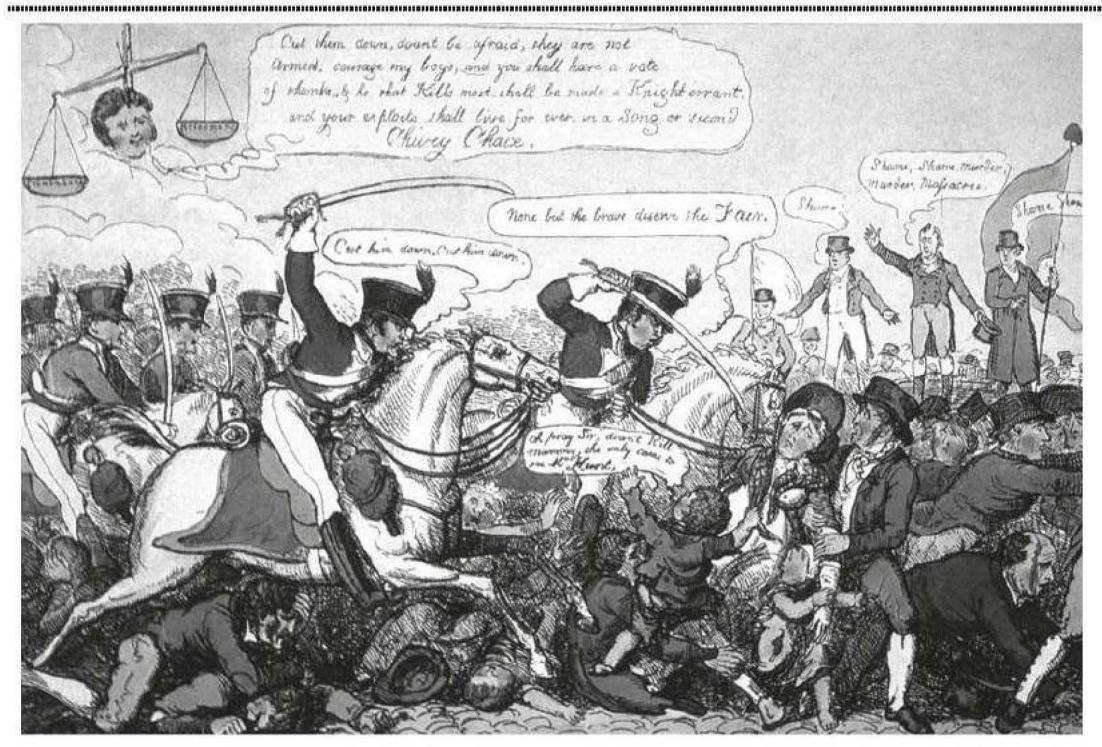
Faced by this show of strength, the Manchester magistrates decided to 'bring the matter to issue'. One of them declared: 'If the agitators of the country determine to persevere in their meeting, it will necessarily prove a trial of strength and there must be a conflict.'

The local authorities got ready. The yeomanry, a volunteer cavalry force mostly made up of Manchester traders and shopkeepers, were called up and professional troops were on stand-by. The magistrates gave the order for the arrest of Henry Hunt. As the yeomanry tried to reach him, the crowd closed ranks to stop them doing so. In the panic that followed, some of the yeomanry used their swords to clear a path and later the troops were sent in.

There are many conflicting opinions about what exactly happened. Some said the yeomanry were drunk. They were certainly inexperienced, probably afraid for their lives. What we do know is that eleven people were killed and 400 injured, many of them crushed in the stampede as they tried to escape. Among the dead were two women and a child. The event became known as 'Peterloo', a mocking comparison with the British victory at the Battle of Waterloo in 1815.

There was an outcry in the press, including *The Times* (see Source 1, page 74) and other middle-class papers. Even in Parliament, the government's critics made much of the 'massacre'. The government came in for criticism when they congratulated the Manchester magistrates for their 'prompt, decisive and efficient measures for the preservation of public tranquillity'. As the story of what happened was told and retold, the radicals attracted more and more sympathy and support while the government became increasingly unpopular.

#### **SOURCE E**



'Manchester heroes', a cartoon by George Cruikshank.

# The Six Acts 1819

Yet it was the government that now took the initiative and went on the offensive; it rushed the Six Acts through Parliament. The Acts:

- banned military-style drilling and training
- gave magistrates increased powers to search for arms
- banned public meetings of over 50 people unless they had magistrates' permission
- speeded up trials
- imposed further restrictions on the press
- increased the tax, or stamp duty, on newspapers so as to make radical writings, like those of Cobbett, too expensive for poorer people.

These tough laws enabled the authorities to suppress political activity further. Then, in March 1820, the leaders of the St Peter's Field meeting, including Henry Hunt, were put on trial and imprisoned for 'assembling with unlawful banners at an unlawful meeting for the purpose of exciting discontent'. Hunt was released in October 1822.

What is the message of the cartoon in Source E? How effective do you think such images were in the politics of the time?

# The decline of popular protest

In the early 1820s, trade improved. With the arrest of their leaders and an economic recovery underway, the people's support for radical politics subsided. The post-war movement had built up a solid body of working-class support but the government and most of the property-owning classes were determined not to give way to radical demands for manhood suffrage. The government kept its nerve, and it had a strong and loyal army to rely on. The lack of middle-class support for reform made it easier for the government to contain the campaign. The radicals had learnt their lesson the hard way and, when the reform movement revived in 1830, they strove to maintain a good working alliance with the middle-class supporters of parliamentary reform.

#### Summary diagram: The government response to radical protest

#### Government responded to the radical threat by:

- Suspending habeas corpus
- Banning meetings of more than 50 people
- Using spies to uncover radical activities

#### Mass meeting in Manchester in 1819 led to further government repression:

- 11 died and hundreds injured at 'Peterloo'
- The Six Acts

political on the Revolution in.

Man represented opposing interest of radical societies, such as interest.

Corresponding Society, was matched by the growing of loyalist associations, while the government responded to the radical threat by passing repressive legislation. The government was shaken by Luddite outbreaks and, after the end of the war, in 1815, imposed higher taxes which particularly hit working people. The Corn Laws were particularly hated.

The French Revolution stimulated much political debate in Britain. Burke's Reflections on the Revolution in France and Paine's Rights of Man represented opposing British views. The emergence of radical societies, such as the London Corresponding Society, was matched by the growth of loyalist associations, while the government responded to the radical threat by passing repressive legislation. The government was shaken by Luddite.



# Refresher questions

Use these questions to remind yourself of the key material covered in this chapter.

- I What threat did the radical reformers pose to the government in the 1790s?
- 2 Why did the publication of Tom Paine's The Rights of Man have such a great impact?
- 3 How did the government respond to radicalism in the 1790s?
- 4 Who were the Luddites?
- 5 What were the effects of the end of the war with France?

- 6 What were the Com Laws?
- 7 Why did so many working people demand parliamentary reform after 1815?
- 8 What was the impact of William Cobbett's Political Register?
- 9 What was the importance of John Cartwright and the Hampden clubs?
- 10 What happened at Peterloo?
- II What was the government's response to popular protest?
- 12 What were the Six Acts of 1819?



# Question practice

#### **ESSAY QUESTIONS**

- 1 How great a threat did radical reformers pose to the government from 1790 to 1819?
- 2 How effective was the government in dealing with the threat of radical reformers from 1790 to 1819?
- 3 To what extent was poverty the cause of popular radicalism from 1790 to 1819?
- 4 'The lack of widespread popular support was the main reason for the failure of radical reformers to achieve parliamentary reform in the years 1790 to 1819.' How far do you agree with this statement?

#### SOURCE ANALYSIS QUESTION

1 Assess the value of Source 1 for revealing the behaviour of the crowd and of the authorities in St Peter's Field. Explain your answer using the source, the information given about its origin and your own knowledge about the historical context.

#### SOURCE I

From John Tyas in a report on the events in St Peter's Field, Manchester, for *The Times*, published on 19 August 1819. Tyas was known to be critical of the parliamentary reform movement and of Henry Hunt in particular.

One banner read, 'Taxation and no Representation is unjust'; on another 'Annual Parliaments, Universal Suffrage and Vote by Ballot' . . . . A posse of 300 or 400 constables marched into the field about twelve o'clock. Not the slightest insult was offered to them. ... The cavalry drew their swords and brandished them fiercely in the air; upon which they rode into the mob which gave way before them. Not a brickbat was thrown at them – not a pistol was fired during this period; all was quiet and orderly. They wheeled around the wagons until they came in front of them.

As soon as Hunt and Johnson [a Manchester radical] had jumped from the wagon (to surrender) a cry was made by the cavalry, 'Have at their flags!' They dashed not only at their flags but those which were posted amongst the crowd, cutting indiscriminately to the right and to left in order to get at them. This set the people running in all directions, and it was not until this act had been committed that any brickbats were hurled at the military. From that moment the Manchester Yeoman Cavalry lost all command of temper ...

Looking around us, we saw a constable at no great distance, and thinking that our only chance of safety rested in placing ourself under his protection, we appealed to him for assistance. He immediately took us into custody, and on us saying we merely attended to report the proceedings of the day, he replied, 'Oh! You then are one of their writers – you must go before the magistrates.' He took us to the house where they were sitting. Just as we came to the house, the constables were conducting Hunt into it, and were treating him in a manner in which they were neither justified by law nor humanity, striking him with their staves on the head.

Was the meeting an 'unlawful assembly'? We believe not. Was anything done at this meeting before the cavalry rode in upon it, contrary to the law or in breach of the peace? No such circumstances are recorded in any of the statements which have yet reached our hands.

# Chartism 1838-50

In the years following the Reform Act of 1832, the laws passed by the reformed Parliament and actions taken by the Whig government led to the emergence of Chartism. The rise and development of this popular, mass movement are examined through the themes of:

- ★ The origins of Chartism
- ★ The Charter, the Petition and the Convention 1837–9
- ★ Chartism in the 1840s

The key debate on page 89 of this chapter asks the question: Why did Chartism fail?

Key d	ales				
1832		Reform Act passed	1839	Sept.	Chartist Convention broke up
1835		Municipal Corporations Act		Nov.	Newport rising
		excluded working classes from local government	1840		National Charter Association set up
1837		Northern Star newspaper started in Leeds by Feargus O'Connor	1842	Мау	Second Chartist petition rejected by Parliament
837-8		Anti-Poor Law campaign		Aug.	'Plug' strikes and riots
1838 1839	May Feb.	Publication of the 'People's Charter' National Convention met in	1845		Chartist Land Plan started
1037		London	1848	April	Chartist meeting on Kennington
	July	First Chartist petition rejected by			Common, London
		Parliament			Third Chartist petition rejected by
		Birmingham riots			Parliament



# The origins of Chartism

Why did the working classes feel let down by the Reform Act and subsequent Whig legislation?

In 1831–2, hundreds of thousands of working people had marched and demonstrated in support of the Reform Bill (see pages 20–2). Although it did not give the vote to working people, many of them were swept along in their enthusiasm for the bill, confident in the hope that it would be a first step on the road to democracy. They joined the middle classes – the manufacturers and the

shopkeepers – in what was a national campaign for reform. Numerous working people first became involved in politics at this time. Many of them had their first experience of attending a political meeting, reading a radical pamphlet or joining a political club. There were other reasons for hope as well. The passing of the Reform Act seemed to show that a well-organised campaign, with demonstrations, meetings, pamphlets and newspapers, all backed up by huge numbers, could achieve change in Parliament.

# The disappointment of the Reform Act

Not surprisingly, however, working people were disappointed when they understood what the terms of the 1832 Reform Act really meant in practice (see pages 27–8). The first Reform Parliament looked and behaved very much like those before 1832. In composition, the new Parliament looked even less sympathetic to the working classes. Henry Hunt, long-time champion of universal suffrage, lost his seat in Parliament. So too did Michael Sadler, who campaigned to reduce the number of hours that factory workers had to work: instead of electing Sadler as their MP, the newly enfranchised middle classes of Leeds used their votes to elect a local factory owner. In the years following the passing of the Reform Act of 1832, the working classes felt increasingly betrayed by the middle classes and the actions of the new Parliament seemed to demonstrate even more opposition to the interests of the working classes than the unreformed Parliaments had done.

It is now necessary to examine the sequence of events that turned workingclass disappointment to anger and the emergence of a new, national, political campaign known as Chartism.

# The Factory Act 1833

In 1830, a campaign, known as the Ten Hour Movement, was launched to limit the length of the working day in factories and mines to ten hours. Yet the Factory Act, which was passed in 1833, was a huge disappointment to the reformers: all they got out of Parliament were restrictions on the hours that children could work in factories. Men and women would still have to work long hours. The new Parliament showed little interest in the improvement of working conditions.

# The Municipal Corporations Act 1835

Three years after passing the Reform Act, Parliament extended the vote for local town councils to all ratepayers. This effectively excluded the working classes from participating in local government because, to be a ratepayer, one had to own property and very few of the working classes did so. As with parliamentary reform in 1832, the working classes were being shut out of the political process. Furthermore, the new town councils began to establish modern police forces that many of the working classes saw as threatening. In Lancashire, local workers referred to the police as the 'plague of blue locusts'.

# The 'war of the unstamped' press

However, in 1836, the radicals gained a victory for the working classes. Since the Acts of 1819 (see page 71), newspapers had had to pay stamp duty, a special tax imposed by the government. This was an attempt to deprive the radical press of its working-class readers because the tax meant that papers cost about 3d. (equivalent to more than £1 today). However, not all newspapers obeyed the law. The Poor Man's Guardian, edited by Henry Hetherington, was priced at a penny and sold over 15,000 copies a week. Other papers followed this lead. Hetherington was imprisoned twice but this did not stop the Poor Man's Guardian from being published in secret locations. In London alone, 740 sellers of unstamped newspapers were put on trial between 1831 and 1836. Eventually, the Whig government gave in and, in 1836, lowered the tax to a point where newspapers could be sold for  $1\frac{1}{2}d$ . This was an important victory since an active press was vital in developing and spreading radical ideas. Furthermore, it showed that a determined and well-organised campaign could force the government to give way.

# The Anti-Poor Law campaign 1837–8

Out of all the developments that led to the emergence of Chartism, the campaign launched against the new Poor Law in 1837 was by far the most significant. Since Elizabethan times, those who could not afford to look after themselves - which included many of the old, sick, disabled and orphans, as well as the unemployed - often had to fall back on 'poor relief' provided by the parish. The parish was the main unit of local government and was responsible for care of the poor. Poor relief was paid for out of local taxes. For those who could not look after themselves in their own homes, such as some of the elderly and the disabled, relief was provided in a local poorhouse, or work house. This was known as 'indoor relief'. But most were given 'outdoor relief' and did not have to enter the workhouse. This could be in the form of food, clothing or money.

The new Poor Law, passed by the Whig government in 1834, was designed to cut the increasing cost of poor relief. It abolished 'outdoor relief' so that poor relief would only be available in workhouses. Furthermore, in order to deter all but the most needy, it stated that conditions in the workhouse were to be 'less eligible' (less pleasant) than those of the poorest paid worker outside. It was no wonder that fear and hatred of the workhouse became widespread among the working classes.

None of the actions of the reformed Parliament seemed quite so punitive as this new law. To working people, it looked as if it was designed to rob them of what they saw as their 'right' to poor relief by forcing them into the workhouse if they came on hard times. Furthermore, it demonstrated how much control Parliament had over the daily lives of working people and how little control the working classes had over their own lives. Even family life seemed to be under threat with the rule that the sexes should be separated in the workhouse.



#### KEY FIGURE

# Henry Hetherington (1792 - 1849)

Owner of the Poor Man's Guardian, he led the 'war of the unstamped', the campaign against 'taxes on knowledge'.



#### **KEY TERM**

Workhouse Sometimes known as the poorhouse, it was the place where those who were too poor or unable to look after themselves had to go for food and shelter.

In what ways, according to Kydd in Source A, did the new Poor Law Amendment Act 'sour the hearts of the labouring population'?

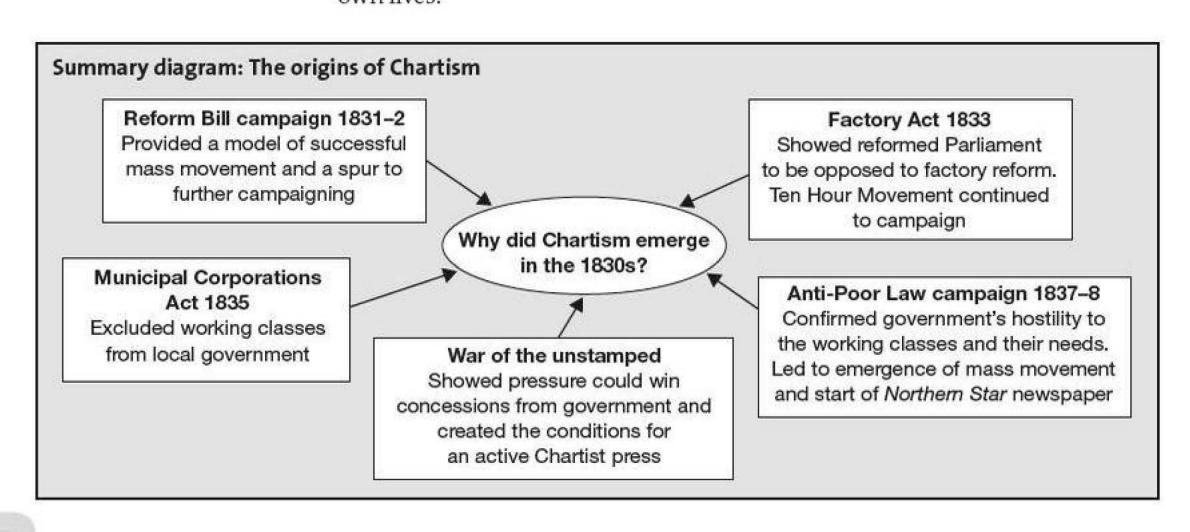
#### **SOURCE A**

# From Samuel Kydd, a young shoemaker in the 1830s, quoted in Eric Evans, Chartism, Longman, 2000.

The passing of the New Poor Law Amendment Act did more to sour the hearts of the labouring population, than did the privations [hardship] consequent on all the poverty of the land. Rightly, or wrongly, may be a subject of discussion, but the fact is undeniable, that the labourers of England believed that the new poor law was a law to punish poverty: and the effects of that belief were, to sap the loyalty of the working men, to make them dislike the country of their birth, to brood over their wrongs, to cherish feelings of revenge, and to hate the rich of the land.

Radical leaders began to tour the country, giving speeches, raising funds and setting up local clubs to oppose the introduction of the new Poor Law in the industrial north. Many of those who had been campaigning for the ten-hour working day now transferred their energies into this new campaign. Feargus O'Connor (see profile on page 86), who was to become the best known and most powerful Chartist leader, started his *Northern Star* newspaper in Leeds. It played a crucial role in spreading news and views across the country, both in this campaign and in the next ten years as the leading Chartist newspaper.

When the Radical MP John Fielden proposed the repeal of the new Poor Law in Parliament, the House of Commons voted against it by 309 to 17 votes. It seemed to the working classes that there was no chance of ever getting Parliament to pass laws that would improve the working and living conditions of poor people. While working people produced the wealth of the country, the 'idle' classes, who were represented in Parliament, held on to the power and lived off the fruits of other men's labour. The conclusion was obvious: working men would have to enter Parliament itself if they were to secure control over, and improve, their own lives.





# The Charter, the Petition and the Convention 1837–9

- ► What were the aims of the Charter?
- What was the significance of the National Petition and Convention?

In 1837, six members of the London Working Men's Association (LWMA), a working-class organisation, assisted by six radical MPs, drew up a list of six points for political reform. These six points became the basis of the 'People's Charter' which was published in May 1838. This document was to give its name to the movement known as Chartism.

# The six points of the Charter

- Universal manhood suffrage: all men over 21 years of age would be allowed to vote.
- Vote by secret ballot: so that all votes could be cast without fear of pressure from landlords or employers.
- · Annual Parliaments: general elections to take place every year.
- Equal electoral districts: so that all constituencies contained roughly the same number of electors.
- Abolition of the property qualification for MPs: so that a parliamentary candidate no longer had to own property.
- Payment for MPs: so that working men could afford to give up their jobs and become MPs.

None of these points was new. Radicals had been calling for all of these changes for many years. What was new was that these six political demands became the symbol and the focus of what was to be a national mass movement. Chartism attracted the support of hundreds of thousands of working people for over ten years. It was the nearest thing Britain has had to a national rising in modern times.

# The National Petition and the Chartist Convention

The Charter containing the six points was taken up by the Birmingham Political Union (see page 15), now revived by its leader, **Thomas Attwood**, and by northern activists such as John Fielden and Feargus O'Connor who had been campaigning against the Poor Law. It was adopted by radicals right across the country. It was then launched in Glasgow, where several textile workers had been imprisoned for leading a strike in May 1838. Here, it was decided that a petition, demanding the six points of the Charter, would be presented to Parliament. Again, this was nothing new. This petition, however, was going to be different. It was going to collect so many signatures that Parliament would



#### **KEY FIGURE**

# Thomas Attwood (1783–1856)

Formed the Birmingham Political Union in 1830 in order to campaign for parliamentary reform. It attracted middle- and working-class support. not be able to ignore it. Those signatures would be collected at mass meetings held all over the country. Also at these meetings, delegates would be appointed to attend a National Convention which would in turn organise the presentation of this National Petition to Parliament.

All went according to plan. Huge meetings were held: over 200,000 people attended each of the meetings in Birmingham, Manchester and Leeds. Smaller meetings were held in hundreds of other towns across the country. These were organised and publicised with the help of the Chartist press, among which the *Northern Star* was the most important. By 1839, it was selling 50,000 copies a week, similar in circulation to *The Times*, the most famous national newspaper. At these meetings, signatures were collected and delegates elected to the National Convention that met in London in February 1839. The Convention claimed to represent *all* the people, unlike Parliament. It was a kind of 'anti-Parliament' or, as some Chartists preferred, the 'real' Parliament. Over 1.25 million signatures were collected in support of the petition. Both the size of the petition [it was three miles (nearly five kilometres) long] and the level of national co-ordination were unprecedented. Yet, in July 1839, Parliament rejected the petition by 235 votes to 46. Most MPs simply decided to have nothing to do with it.

# 'Moral force' versus 'physical force'

From now onwards, things did not go according to plan because there was no plan. The members of the Convention had discussed what to do if Parliament rejected the petition but had not been able to reach a decision. The big issue was whether or not to use force.

Most Chartists were passionate believers in 'moral force'. They believed that Chartism was so obviously a just and fair cause that they could win people over with the power of their arguments. However, most also believed that they needed the sheer force of numbers behind them if they were to persuade a property-owning Parliament to agree to universal suffrage. Many of the meetings held before the Chartist Convention had used 'the language of menace', just as they had in the Reform Bill campaign of 1831–2. At the big Birmingham meeting in May 1838, Attwood had said: 'No blood shall be shed by us; but if our enemies shed blood – if they attack the people – they must take the consequences upon their own heads.'

#### SOURCE B

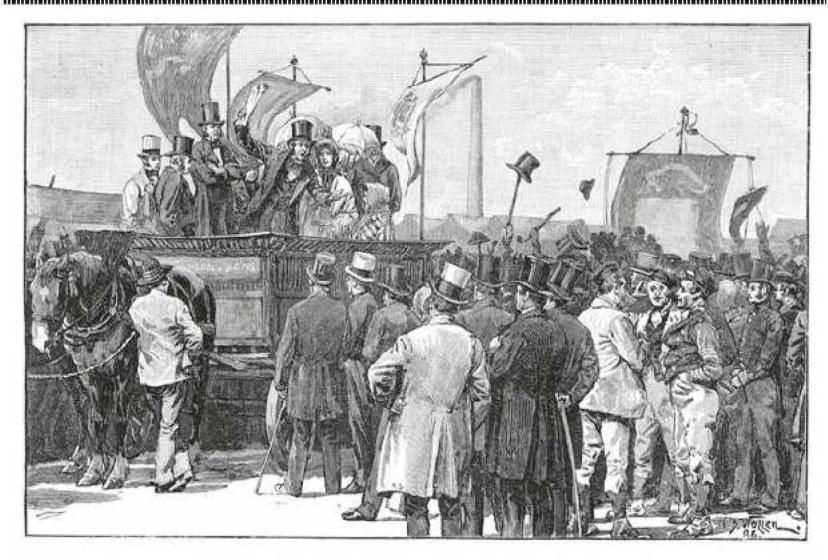
From Robert Gammage, *History of the Chartist Movement*, 1837–1854, Browne & Browne, 1854. Gammage was himself a Chartist.

Mr. Attwood delivered a speech. He professed himself a peaceful man, and declared that he would never sanction the commission of violence for gaining the people's object ... he told his hearers that although he would be opposed to the employment of any violence, if the people were attacked the consequences

Study Source B. In what ways and to what extent is Attwood employing 'the language of menace'?

must fall on the heads of the aggressors. He told the meeting too, that if the government dared to arrest him in the execution of his peaceful purpose, a hundred thousand men would march to demand his release.

#### SOURCE C



How would you describe the tone of the meeting and the behaviour of those attending as shown in Source C?

#### A Chartist demonstration.

This idea of 'defensive violence' was adopted by many Chartist leaders. It was summed up by the slogan 'Peacefully if we can, forcefully if we must'. There was not a clear-cut division between 'moral force' and 'physical force' Chartists. O'Connor has often been associated with physical force Chartism, yet he was primarily an advocate of the peaceful approach. He knew that working men could not defeat the soldiers of the regular army.

In the Convention it was suggested that a Sacred Month (or a national holiday) should be adopted if Parliament rejected the petition. This meant that Chartists would withdraw their labour and go on strike for a month. The delegates at the Convention recognised that this would be a direct challenge to the employers and to the governing classes as a whole, especially as it had the potential to wreck the economy. It would probably bring about a physical confrontation in which troops would be used and many people killed. Although the Convention decided, in the end, not to recommend a Sacred Month, discussions like these scared several of the Chartist delegates, especially the middle-class ones. Attwood, himself an employer, left the Convention in September 1839 saying that he 'washed his hands of any idea, of any appeal to physical force'. Yet he himself had used the 'language of menace' a year before (see Source B, page 80).



#### **KEY FIGURE**

# William Lovett (1800–77)

One of the chief authors of the People's Charter. Like many other Chartists, he was imprisoned for a time. After his release he worked to improve working-class education and was much criticised by O'Connor for relying purely on 'moral force' Chartism. In July 1839, members of the (London) Metropolitan Police were used to break up a peaceful Chartist meeting in Birmingham. It led to a fortnight of rioting. William Lovett, who was secretary of the Chartist Convention, produced a placard accusing the local authorities in Birmingham of 'a flagrant and unjust outrage, using a bloody and unconstitutional force from London' to break up the meeting. For this, he was arrested and sentenced to a year in prison. His crime was seditious libel. Lovett is usually seen as a leading 'moral force' Chartist, yet here he was defending the actions of the Birmingham crowd in fighting the police. He would have regarded this as an example of 'defensive violence'.

# The Convention breaks up, September 1839

Although the Convention voted against the idea of a month-long strike, the delegates called for a three-day strike in August. The response in the localities varied: many Chartists refused to leave work and so lose their pay (and, perhaps, their jobs) for what they saw as a short-term gesture. Others, in the most loyal Chartist districts, stayed off work and attended rallies. Many local leaders were arrested for their speeches, for threatening behaviour or for riot.

The Chartist Convention broke up in September 1839. There was still much support for direct action, despite the arrest of many leading Chartists, but the rejection of the petition had led to confusion about what to do next. The Convention delegates returned to their localities and the movement lost its central direction. Much would now depend on local leaders.

# The Newport rising 1839

In November 1839, nearly 10,000 men marched from towns and villages in south Wales to Newport in Monmouthshire. Most of them were miners and ironworkers. Many of them were armed – with pikes, guns or just wooden clubs – and they marched in military formation. They arrived at dawn on 4 November in Newport. They surrounded the Westgate Hotel, where some local Chartist leaders were being held under armed guard. There was a small force of troops who started firing which may, or may not, have been in response to initial shots from the Chartists. However, the Chartists certainly fled and over twenty bodies were left at the scene. It remains uncertain who fired first or what the intentions of the marchers were.

One historian believes that a 'monster demonstration' had been intended, a show of force to protest against the recent arrest of local Chartists. But the authorities saw it as an armed uprising intended as the signal for similar risings elsewhere. It had certainly been planned for some time and kept secret from the authorities. One Chartist, a 17-year-old boy, left a letter to his parents before setting off: 'I shall this night be engaged in a struggle for freedom and should it please God to spare my life I shall see you soon; but if not, grieve not for me for I shall fall in a noble cause.'

The historical evidence suggests that the rising was not part of a co-ordinated, national plot, but that the plan was to take control of the town of Newport and to inspire Chartists elsewhere to do the same. Three of the leaders were sentenced to death for attempting to overthrow the State by force, but the Whig government, keen to avoid making martyrs, changed the sentence to transportation instead. The rising did, however, give the government the justification it needed to move against the Chartists and, over the next two years, nearly 500 were imprisoned.

# The nature of Chartism

In 1839, the writer Thomas Carlyle described Chartism as 'bitter discontent grown fierce and mad'. Historians have debated whether this discontent was caused by political or economic factors. It is certainly true that years of maximum support for Chartism were years of economic depression (1838–9, 1842 and 1848) when trade was poor and many were thrown out of work. This has led some historians to see Chartism as a form of 'hunger politics'.

However, other historians have concluded that it was politically motivated. They stress that Chartism grew out of the anger and frustration that working people felt in the years after the Reform Act. Parliament showed little interest in the living and working conditions of ordinary people, therefore working people would have to enter Parliament themselves and make the reforms that would improve their lives. The six points of the Charter would enable them to do this. Whatever the local conditions, working people throughout Britain could agree on the political points of the Charter. It was the one thing that united all those who met, marched and demonstrated. It kept alive working-class hopes throughout the years 1838–48.

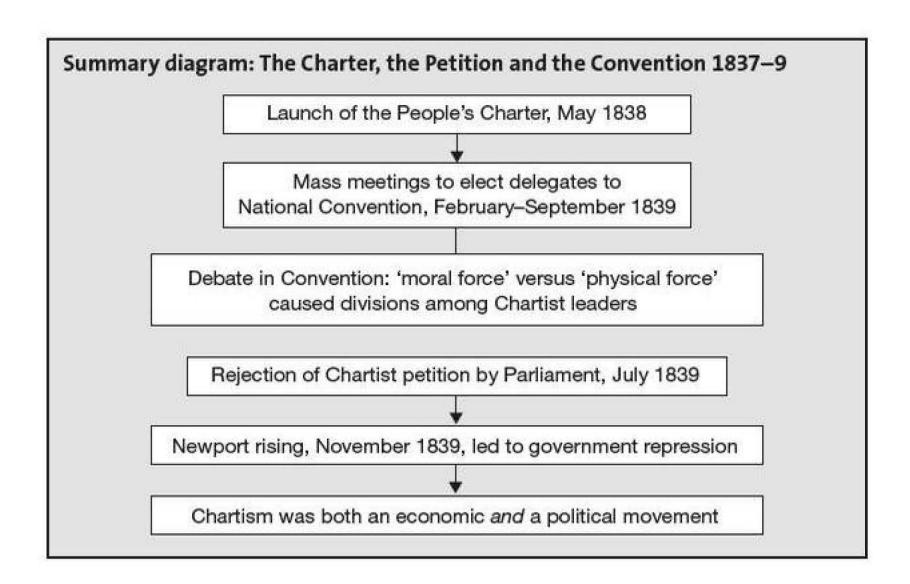
Chartism was certainly fuelled by unemployment, low wages and hunger but the Charter was seen as the solution. If working people were to take control of their own lives and bring about social and economic change, they would have to gain political power first. Chartism is best seen as both an economic *and* a political movement in that it was composed of political activists who wanted to use politics to improve their living and working conditions and thus make for a more just and fair society.

#### SOURCE D

From Bronterre O'Brien, *The Operative*, 17 March 1839. O'Brien, a leading Chartist, was a journalist and thinker whom O'Connor called 'the Schoolmaster of Chartism'. He was editor of *The Operative*.

Universal suffrage means meat and drink and clothing, good hours, and good beds, and good substantial furniture for every man, woman and child who will do a fair day's work. Universal suffrage means a complete mastery, by all the people over all the laws and institutions in the country; and with that mastery the power of providing suitable employment for all, as well as of securing to all the full proceeds of their employment.

Study Source D. In what ways does O'Brien suggest that Chartism was both an economic and a political movement?





# Chartism in the 1840s

- What new strategies emerged after 1839 and how did the government respond?
- Why had Chartism failed to achieve its aims by 1850?

# The National Charter Association

Despite the failure of the first petition and the arrest of hundreds of Chartist leaders, the Chartist movement did not collapse, but it had to be reorganised. Most Chartists recognised that a stronger central organisation was necessary to prevent the movement fragmenting. While O'Connor was imprisoned in York Castle, he continued to write articles for the *Northern Star*. Among other things, he encouraged the establishment of the **National Charter Association (NCA)**. Set up in 1840, this was to be the most important Chartist organisation for the rest of the decade. By 1842, it had 50,000 members in 400 branches across the country.

# 'New moves'

Meanwhile, other Chartist leaders embarked on different strategies. When William Lovett was released from prison in 1840, he concentrated his energies on promoting education for the working classes. He devised a scheme with schools, libraries and teacher training colleges. He and several other Chartist leaders argued that the working classes had to prove, by self-help and self-improvement, that they were responsible citizens. Respectable behaviour would



# National Charter Association (NCA)

A national, political organisation. It set up branches across Britain and members paid subscriptions to join. Many historians see it as the first independent, working-class political party, a forerunner of the Labour Party.

calm the fears of the propertied classes and show that the working classes were 'ready' for the vote. Other Chartists advocated teetotal Chartism (that is, taking the vow not to drink alcohol), and, in Birmingham, a Chartist Church was set up.

These new schemes were all exclusively 'moral force' strategies. O'Connor, however, attacked these 'new moves', not because he disapproved of education, teetotalism or Christianity, but because he saw them as distracting attention from the strategy of petitioning backed up by weight of numbers.

O'Connor and his supporters organised the collection of signatures for a second petition and the meeting of another convention in 1842. Three million signatures were collected for the petition. Helped by economic depression and rising unemployment, 1842 was probably the year of Chartism's greatest strength in terms of mass support. But, yet again, in May 1842, Parliament rejected the petition by a huge majority.

# The 'Plug' strikes and riots, August 1842

A few months later, in August 1842, and much to the surprise of many Chartist leaders, a rash of strikes broke out. With many workers being laid off and even more suffering wage cuts, strikes spread from Lancashire and Yorkshire to the industrial parts of the Midlands and Scotland. As the strikers went from factory to factory gaining support, they pulled the plugs from the boilers, to prevent the steam engines from working, and thus forcing the factories to close down.

In the late 1830s and early 1840s, 6000 troops were deployed in the north. They were led by **General Napier**. He was sympathetic towards the Chartists and attributed many of the disturbances to the new Poor Law. He did not underestimate the Chartist numbers but it was pity, rather than fear, which he felt for them: 'Their threats of attack are miserable. With half a cartridge, and half a pike, with no money, no discipline, no skilful leaders, they would attack men with leaders, money and discipline, well-armed.' The Chartists were no match for the physical force of the troops.

There were many violent confrontations between Chartists and the authorities. Local police forces were used effectively and troops were moved quickly around the trouble spots on the recently-built railways. Hundreds of arrests were made, this time on the orders of the new Conservative government that had been elected in 1841. The new government was swifter and firmer in its response to Chartist disturbances than the Whigs had been. By the end of 1842, about 1500 people had been put on trial for Chartist-related offences.

# Economic recovery and the Land Plan 1845–8

Chartism lost its mass support in the mid-1840s. This was for several reasons:

- the arrest of many of its leaders
- divisions among other leaders



#### **KEY FIGURE**

# General Napier (1782–1853)

Commander of the troops sent north to deal with the Chartist threat.

- economic recovery, especially with the boom in railway building
- reforms carried out by the government.

The reforms of the new Conservative government showed that even a Parliament in which the poor had no say was capable of recognising and responding to distress in industrial areas and passing reforms. These reforms, such as reducing import taxes on some foodstuffs and reintroducing income tax which only the better-off paid, took some of the sting out of Chartism.

Nevertheless, Chartist hopes were kept alive, even revived, by the Chartist Land Company. This was O'Connor's scheme to establish rural Chartist communities. Chartists were invited to buy shares in the company; if their names were drawn out by lot, they would receive plots of land to cultivate. Among the industrial working class this proved to be hugely popular. By 1848, 100,000 people had subscribed and five communities had been set up, each with homes, schools and parks.

However, the authorities hounded O'Connor and his company. They failed to discover any evidence of financial malpractice, but they did find a legal technicality that enabled them to wind up the company.

# Feargus O'Connor

1794	Born into an Irish landowning family			
1832	Elected MP for County Cork in Ireland			
1837	Established the Northern Star newspaper			
1840	Found guilty of publishing seditious libel (language encouraging rebellion against the government) and imprisoned for eighteen months			
1845	Set up the Chartist Land Plan (see below)			
1847	MP for Nottingham, the only Chartist elected to Parliament in the general election			
1855	Died			

O'Connor trained as a lawyer and came to prominence when he established the *Northern Star* in Leeds in 1837. He campaigned against the new Poor Law and later emerged as the most powerful and controversial Chartist leader.

The Northern Star was the most widely read Chartist journal; its weekly delivery was awaited eagerly in towns and villages across Britain. O'Connor wrote the front page 'letter' each week, but many others contributed.

The paper acted as a unifying element, enabling news and views to be exchanged. It also helped to sustain Chartism as a national movement at times



when it might have fragmented into a collection of local campaigns. O'Connor appointed and paid agents to work in different parts of the country so that they could report for the paper and also act as full-time organisers. Profits from the paper were used to pay the expenses of Chartists who were put on trial and to support the families of those imprisoned.

O'Connor was a powerful speaker, but was widely accused of being arrogant and a 'rabble rouser'. Lovett and other 'moral force' leaders criticised the violence of his language and some said that he raised unrealistic expectations in his listeners. But he was praised by many of those who worked closely with him. The historian Dorothy Thompson has written: 'No other leader or would-be leader in those years had the energy, ability or charisma of Feargus O'Connor. For good or ill, he was the main inspiration and guiding force of the movement.'

O'Connor died in 1855: estimates of the number who attended his funeral vary from 20,000 to 40,000.

# 1848: the final phase

In the 1847 general election O'Connor was elected to Parliament, the only Chartist to succeed in doing so. Inspired by this and news of another revolution in France, a third Chartist petition and convention was planned for April 1848.

Support for Chartism again increased, partly because of the return of economic depression and the resulting distress that was experienced in the industrial areas. A mass meeting was planned to take place on Kennington Common, just south of the Houses of Parliament, where the petition would be delivered after the meeting.

The government was not taking any chances. They had 7000 troops, 4000 policemen and 85,000 special constables recruited, mostly from the middle class. In the event, the meeting attracted a crowd of only about 20,000. It went off peacefully and the procession was stopped before it reached Parliament. However, the leaders and the petition, with 5 million signatures, were allowed through. A parliamentary committee examined the petition and declared that less than half the signatures were genuine. Again, it was rejected.

There was an upsurge of violence in the Chartist heartlands of Lancashire and Yorkshire, particularly in the most depressed textile-producing areas, and there were many more arrests. However, after 1848, support for Chartism declined rapidly. Chartists continued to meet and hold conventions through the 1850s but there was no longer a mass following.

#### **SOURCE E**



The demonstration on Kennington Common, April 1848. This is the earliest known photograph of a mass demonstration.

What impression do you get of the nature of the demonstration shown in Source E?

# The failure of Chartism

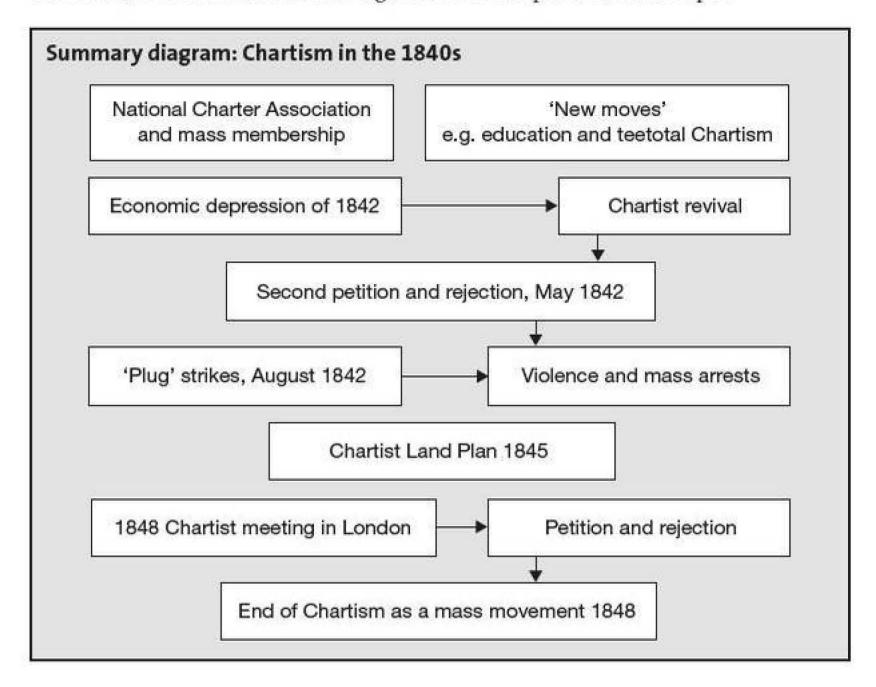
None of the six points of the Charter was achieved until much later (and one, annual Parliaments, has never been accepted). To that extent, Chartism was a failure. The governing classes were never going to give way. They had brought the middle classes into the political process in 1832 and, after that, the property-owning classes as a whole were united in their determination to exclude the working classes.

Not surprisingly, the power of the State was too strong for the Chartists. The army was loyal and professional police forces had been established across most of the country by the 1840s. The government had the support of the magistrates and extensive use was made of the courts to pick off and imprison Chartist leaders. The railways enabled troops to be moved far more quickly to where they were needed and the government made good use of another new technology – the electric telegraph – to speed up communications.

However, there were positive outcomes for the Chartists. Hundreds of thousands of working men and women – there were over 100 female radical associations in the 1840s – gained valuable political experience. The working classes had become far more independent and resourceful. In the years ahead, working people:

- set up trade unions
- continued to be engaged in political clubs and societies
- and, at the end of the century, helped to establish the Labour Party, set up to represent the working classes in Parliament.

As historian Edward Royle writes: 'The Chartists' greatest achievement was Chartism, a movement shot through not with despair but with hope'.





# Key debate

# ▶ Why did Chartism fail?

The first historian of the movement, Robert Gammage, who had been a local Chartist leader, blamed poor leadership, especially that of O'Connor, whose life, he wrote, 'presents a series of mistakes and contradictions'. Since then other historians, even while not so critical of O'Connor, have acknowledged divisions among the leaders and disagreements over strategy. Yet more, however, have emphasised the strength and confidence of the government's response in order to explain why Chartism failed.

# The weakness of the movement

The Chartists made three huge efforts, in 1838-9, in 1841-2 and in 1848, and enlisted the support of hundreds of thousands of working people across the country, yet they failed to achieve their ends. One of the main reasons for this is that they had only a very small number of allies in the House of Commons and, once their petitions had been rejected by Parliament, their leaders were divided in their responses. The historian John Walton sees the movement's most difficult problems arising from 'the contradictions inherent in stirring up enthusiasm through potent rhetoric, while stopping short of advocating an insurrection which seemed bound to fail; and this posed impossible questions when the constitutional modes of agitation had been exhausted'.

Another historian points out the strategic shortcomings.

#### EXTRACT I

## From Edward Royle, Chartism, Longman, 1980, p. 56.

One might conclude that the real weakness of Chartist strategy is that they had no coherent or effective strategy to offer. The moral-force educationalists were hopelessly naive about the preconditions for change, and the physical-force advocates, caught up in their own rhetoric, were unable or unwilling to separate fact from fancy, and to ask whether the use of force was either possible or desirable. Those leaders who thought most clearly ... saw that Chartism had to rest on the mass of the people, but that the people needed more organisation before they could act for change.

When the Chartists did resort to violence, as at Newport in 1839 and in parts of Yorkshire in 1848, it did little to further their cause. Instead of panicking the government and its new middle-class allies into conceding Chartist demands, it fortified their alliance in defence of property and order.

O'Connor himself, far from being a cause of Chartist failure, played a central role in maintaining the movement's national campaign. He was unrivalled as an agitator and an orator and he came to symbolise the independence of workingclass political struggle. As the historian Dorothy Thompson wrote: 'Remove him and his newspaper and the movement fragments, localises and loses its continuity.' However, O'Connor was a divisive figure and many Chartist leaders took different routes after the disappointments of 1839 and 1842.

# The power of the State

Chartism mobilised hundreds of thousands, and demonstrated the existence of a working class able to think and act for itself. The 'threat' of Chartism was not that of the 'mob' driven to despair, although hard times did increase support for Chartism, but rather that of a group challenging for power. What we can be certain of is that the Whig and Tory governments who rejected the petitions in 1839, 1842 and 1848 feared the consequences of accepting the Charter far more than the dangers involved in turning it down. In this interpretation, Chartist failure was a reflection of the strength of its adversaries, rather than its own inherent weakness.

By the 1840s, the State was far more confident. By enfranchising the middle classes in 1832, it had detached them from their 'dangerous' alliance with the working classes and, instead, it had created a 'propertied alliance' between the landowning and the middle classes. Furthermore, the State had gained much experience of handling radical disaffection and it avoided creating martyrs as it had done at Peterloo in 1819 (see page 70). For instance, the death sentences handed down after the Newport rising were commuted to transportation.

The government was well informed by local magistrates while the railways allowed for the quick movement of forces to where they were needed. For instance, 60 police were swiftly dispatched from London to deal with the crowd that had gathered in the centre of Birmingham on 5 July 1839. In the north, thousands of troops were deployed. Their leader, General Napier, was far from being repressive. In fact, he was sympathetic towards Chartism, but the government's show of force could never be matched by the Chartists. Furthermore, from the early 1840s, the use of the electric telegraph gave the government far better knowledge of what was happening in different parts of the country. This, in turn, enabled it to deploy police and troops more effectively.

Government reforms in the 1840s undoubtedly weakened the Chartist case that only a reformed Parliament could alleviate the harsh conditions of life for the working poor. The Poor Law, in practice, was less threatening than many had feared. Taxes on foodstuffs were reduced and the Ten Hours Act was finally passed in 1847.

#### EXTRACT 2

## From John Walton, Chartism, Routledge, 1999, p. 72.

The state was no longer necessarily the enemy, and this sea-change was taking place without the thoroughgoing democratic reform which Chartism held to be indispensable ... Moreover, while the state was softening its stance in so many areas of social and economic policy, it continued to build up the police forces, barracks, telegraph networks and other technologies of control which were to make it easier to suppress the last Chartist upsurge in 1848 ... The state gave ground where there was scope for doing so ... but it reserved its powers to coerce and control by legal and military discipline; and this combination of flexibility and strength proved very effective in stabilising the constitution.

In conclusion, divisions in the leadership, particularly over strategy, contributed to the failure of Chartism but so too did other factors, most notably the strength of the government's response.

#### EXTRACT 3

# From Eric Evans, Chartism, Pearson Education, 2000, p. 119.

Chartism never had a realistic chance of success anyway, given the Whigs' ability to secure a substantial portion of middle-class allegiance to the old order by the 'Great' Reform Act of 1832. Chartist demonstrations of collective support were immensely impressive on one level but most of its own leaders recognised that they were powerless against the concerted efforts of a powerful, and increasingly confident, government. A combination of sustained economic revival and declining will (exacerbated by almost continual disagreements over strategy and tactics) was sufficient to see off the Chartist threat by the end of the 1840s.

How far do the historians quoted in Extracts 1-3 agree or differ in their interpretations of the reasons for the failure of Chartism?

Chartism arose out of the exclusion of the working classes from the right to vote in both parliamentary and local elections and from further disappointment with subsequent Whig legislation. The Anti-Poor Law campaign of 1837–8 fed directly into Chartism. The six points of the Charter were published in May 1838 and delegates were elected to a National Convention. When Parliament ignored the first petition, divisions emerged in the Convention about how to respond. The show of 'physical force' at Newport in 1839 was a failure and led to the imprisonment of hundreds of Chartists.



# Refresher questions

Use these questions to remind yourself of the key material covered in this chapter.

- I Why did the 1832 Reform Act prove so disappointing to the working classes?
- 2 What impact did the unstamped press have on the radical movement?
- 3 How important was the Anti-Poor Law campaign in the emergence of Chartism?
- 4 What were the main points of the Charter?
- 5 How important was the National Petition?
- 6 How did members of the Convention view the use of force?

- 7 Was the Newport rising an attempt to overthrow the government or a demonstration that went wrong?
- 8 How did the government respond to the Chartists' new strategies after 1839?
- 9 How did the government react to the Plug disturbances?
- 10 What was the Chartist Land Plan?
- Why had Chartism failed to achieve its aims by 1850?



# Question practice

#### **ESSAY QUESTIONS**

- 1 'The passing of the new Poor Law in 1834 was the main reason why Chartism attracted mass support in the years from 1837 to 1841.' How far do you agree with this statement?
- 2 To what extent do you agree with the view that Chartism was primarily the product of economic depression in the years from 1837 to 1848?
- 3 'Inept leadership characterised the leadership of both the radical reformers from 1790 to 1819 and of the Chartists from 1837 to 1848.' To what extent do you agree with this statement?
- 4 'The power of the State was always going to prevent the Chartists succeeding in their aims.' How far do you agree with this statement?

# The Contagious Diseases Acts and the campaign for their repeal 1862–86

The Contagious Diseases Acts authorised the police to arrest women suspected of being prostitutes and to have them subjected to highly invasive medical examinations by doctors. The reasons for the passage of these Acts, the impact on women and the campaign for their repeal are examined in this chapter through the following themes:

- ★ Prostitution in mid-nineteenth-century Britain
- ★ The Contagious Diseases Acts 1864, 1866 and 1869
- ★ The impact of the Acts on prostitutes and ordinary women
- ★ The campaign for repeal 1867–86

Key dates			
1854–6	Crimean War highlighted the poor health of British soldiers	1869	Ladies' Protest published in <i>Daily</i> News
1862	Committee of Inquiry into venereal disease in army	1870	Henry Storks defeated in Colchester by-election
1864 1866	Contagious Diseases Act passed Second Contagious Diseases Act	1872–3	Regional electoral leagues organised to campaign for repeal
1869	Third Contagious Diseases Act National Association for Repeal	1874	James Stansfeld took on leadership role of campaign for repeal
	of the Contagious Diseases Act formed	1883	House of Commons' motion led to end of compulsory examinations
Dec.	Formation of Ladies' National Association	1886	Repeal of Contagious Diseases Acts



# Prostitution in mid-nineteenthcentury Britain

What were the main causes of prostitution?

Prostitution was a cause of great concern in Victorian Britain. It was seen not only as a moral and health problem but also as a threat to public order and stability. So worried were politicians, doctors and local authorities that a series of Contagious Diseases Acts were passed in the 1860s. These Acts gave rise to a nationwide campaign of protest, agitation and eventual reform. To understand how these Acts came about, it is necessary to examine the causes of prostitution in mid-nineteenth-century Britain.

The underlying reason why women worked as prostitutes was undoubtedly economic:

- Most working-class women had little or no education and were limited to poorly paid jobs. Some jobs might provide only temporary or seasonal work, such as farm work.
- The biggest source of employment was undoubtedly domestic service, although many of those employed as servants in the houses of the upper and middle classes were poorly paid, as were those in dressmaking and similar occupations. Also very poorly paid and often irregular or unpredictable were jobs like laundry work or selling goods on the street.
- Many prostitutes had worked in these areas and then lost their jobs or, even if they were still employed, could not survive on their meagre earnings.
- · For many women, prostitution was the only alternative to going into the workhouse, where a woman gave up any remaining autonomy, or independence, which she had and was subjected to harsh discipline.
- Finally, many women saw prostitution as temporary or part-time, a way of tiding themselves over until they could secure work again or earn enough to live independently.

However, more often than not, it was home and family circumstances which, when added to the impact of poverty, led to prostitution. Overcrowding at home (it was not uncommon for several children to share a bed) and cruel, uncaring and sometimes alcoholic, parents or stepparents were reported by rescue workers to be what drove some women on to the streets. A sizeable number were orphans. It is unlikely that many made the conscious, planned decision to become a prostitute that 'Swindling Sal' did:



#### **KEY TERM**

Rescue workers People who cared for prostitutes or 'fallen women' as they were called in Victorian times.

#### **SOURCE A**

'Swindling Sal', quoted in Judith Walkowitz, Prostitution and Victorian Society, Cambridge University Press, 1982, p. 13.

I was a servant gal away down in Birmingham. I got tired of workin' and slavin' to make a living, ... what o' five pun' a year and yer grub, I'd sooner starve, I would. After a bit I went to Coventry, cut brummagem [Birmingham], as we calls it in those parts, and took up with soldiers as was quartered there. I soon got tired of them. Soldiers is good – soldiers is – to walk with and that, but they don't pay; cos why they ain't got no money; so I says to myself, I'll go to Lunnon [London] and I did. I soon found my level there.

There is little evidence to suggest that many prostitutes had made such an intentional, business-like decision as Sal, although it is a myth to think that the typical prostitute was usually the helpless victim of seduction or rape by her middle-class employer, as was thought in the past. Most of the women interviewed by rescue workers and local authorities were in their late teens or early twenties. There is plentiful evidence that, after a few years, many found alternative employment and settled down, got married, often with a working-class man who had been a client, and became 'respectable'.

# Victorian attitudes to prostitution

Many, especially middle-class, Victorians saw prostitution as a moral threat to society. Prostitutes challenged the commonly held middle-class view that women were pure, that they were virgins until they were married and, then, passively submitted to their husbands' sexual advances and their duty to produce children. Victorian men were prone to think of women as whores or virgins, and that the former had 'fallen'. Prostitution was seen as something that contaminated society and threatened the institution of marriage and the sanctity of the family. Prostitution was seen as harming the minds of the innocent as it 'flaunts about the streets, it meets our sons and our daughters, and it taints the atmosphere in which it moves'.

Prostitution was also viewed as a cause of public disorder because prostitutes often visited pubs and other places of public entertainment. In 1886, people living near Clapham Common in south London reported to the Home Office that the Common was infested with prostitutes and nightly 'disgusting exhibitions of vice'. In fact, local police retorted that respectable women and courting couples were to be found on the Common and that the few prostitutes there were behaved discreetly.

Not only were many Victorians worried about the 'great social evil' of prostitution. Some, both men and women, saw it as a necessary, or inescapable, evil because men, unlike women, had a 'natural' sex drive which, many believed, could not be satisfied within marriage. This epitomised the double standard, the hypocrisy, of Victorian morality.

For what reasons, according to Source A, did Sal go to Coventry and, later, to London?

?

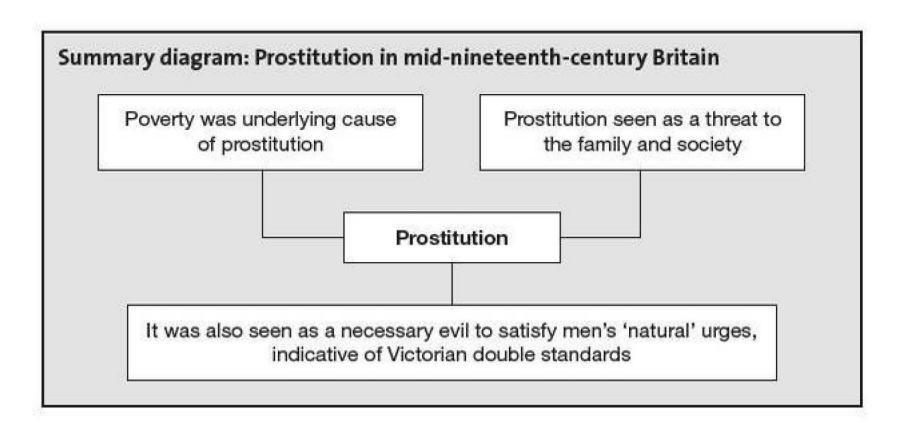
In what ways, according to Source B, were social differences between men and women justified in Victorian Britain?

#### SOURCE B

# From Susie L. Steinbach, *Understanding the Victorians*, Routledge, 2012, p. 135.

The sexual double standard rested in part on a belief ... that there were important biological differences between men and women. Men were aggressive and characterised by their physical strength. Women were passive. It was their natural destiny to give birth, and whether or not they did they were dominated by their menstrual periods and pregnancy. They could not physically or mentally exert themselves too far or else they would drain needed energies from their wombs. Many commentators drew on perceived physical differences between male and female animals to justify social differences between men and women.

Nowhere was the need to find an outlet for men's natural urges more necessary than in towns with military bases and in ports. Many unmarried soldiers were stationed in the former, known as garrison towns, and, in the latter, were sailors home on leave. The government and military authorities had recognised that sexually transmitted infections were rampant among these men and thus perceived a need to provide safe sex for these men, not any concern for women's welfare, and this was what led to the passing of the Contagious Diseases Act of 1864.





# The Contagious Diseases Acts 1864, 1866 and 1869



Why were the Contagious Diseases Acts passed?

The **Crimean War** of 1854–6 was the main catalyst in raising concern about the health of the military. In the war, Britain sustained far more casualties in the hospitals than on the battlefield. Newspaper reports, and even early photographs, provided evidence of foul living conditions. After the war, an army statistical department was set up and it began to publish annual reports on the health of the army, a practice which the navy had already adopted. These reports highlighted the high degree of **venereal disease** among the troops and, by 1864, showed that it accounted for one in three sick cases. The morale and fighting fitness of the army were at stake.

It was no different in the navy. Some reports suggested it was even worse:

#### SOURCE C

From A Statement of Certain Immoral Practices Prevailing in H.M. Navy by Admiral Edward Hawker, quoted in Judith Walkowitz, Prostitution and Victorian Society, Cambridge University Press, 1982, p. 73.

Let those who have never seen a ship of war, picture to themselves a very large and very low room with 500 men and probably 300 or 400 women of the vilest description shut up in it, and giving way to every excess of debauchery that the grossest passions of human nature can lead them to, and they see the deck of a gun ship upon the night of her arrival in port.

It is not surprising that ships docked in Portsmouth harbour, with a full complement of sailors, were often incapable of sailing a few weeks later because of the high rate of infection.

Some clergymen, doctors and evangelical Christians condemned male sexual licence, claiming that it desecrated the 'holy union' of marriage. However, a common view, among men at any rate, and some women, was that illicit, commercial sex was inescapable. It simply needed to be contained, made safer and regulated.

Local hospitals (known as 'lock hospitals'), financed by voluntary subscription, already provided care for diseased prostitutes on a voluntary basis. Now the government was to intervene and make examination of prostitutes compulsory.



#### **KEY TERMS**

Crimean War A war, 1854–6, in which Britain and France fought Russia.

**Venereal disease** Sexually transmitted disease.

Evangelical Christians
Christians who believed that
God called on them to do
good, for example for social
and moral improvement.

Why might scenes like this in Source C be so alarming to the author and the naval authorities?



# The 1862 Committee of Inquiry

In 1862, a committee was set up to enquire into venereal disease among the military. Florence Nightingale, a nurse who had campaigned for better health care in the Crimea, and other members of the committee, argued for more hospital care for diseased men (and women) and penalties for men who concealed that they had venereal disease. They also advocated improved sanitation in the barracks and more leisure activities to relieve the boredom of life in the barracks or on board a ship. However, Sir John Liddell, directorgeneral of the naval medical department, argued for more regulation of prostitutes. Furthermore, he cited what was common practice in India, Hong Kong and other British colonies. In these places, prostitutes who served British soldiers were often subjected to compulsory medical examination by British army doctors and this practice had been highly effective in reducing rates of venereal disease among the military. Liddell had his way.

# The Contagious Diseases Act 1864

The Contagious Diseases Act of 1864 applied to specific garrison towns and ports in England and Ireland. It authorised police, in these 'subjected districts', to arrest women on the streets if they were suspected of being a 'common prostitute', to register them and ensure they attended medical examination by army or navy surgeons. If they were found to be diseased, they could be detained for up to three months for treatment or until they were cured.

The Act was passed with little debate in Parliament. Some MPs, in ignorance of the actual content, thought that they had passed an Act that affected animals, as an earlier bill with the same name – the Contagious Diseases Bill – had been passed for the control of foot-and-mouth disease in cattle.

# The impact of the 1864 Act

There was some early criticism of the 1864 Act. Was it a sanitary or a police measure? Was the highly invasive examination of women, who were picked up by the police on the basis of suspicion or just because they happened to be out at night, an infringement of their rights?

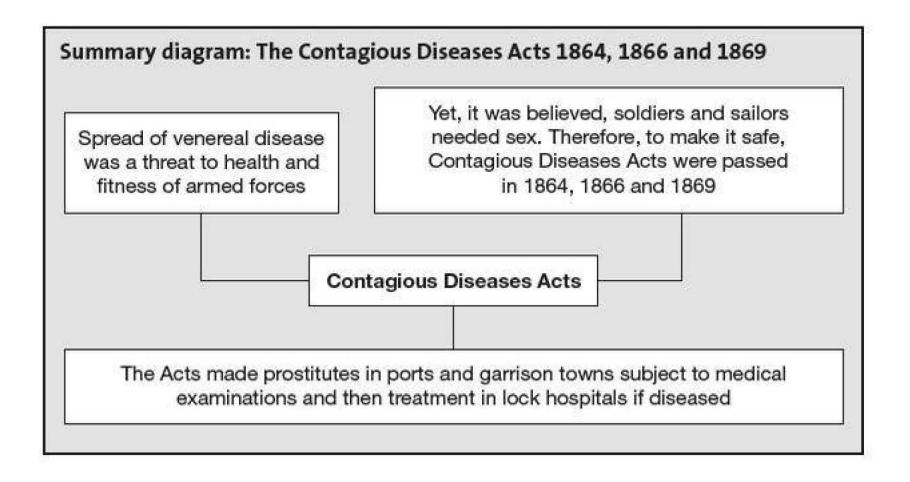
Nevertheless, much of the early reception of the Act was positive. The Contagious Diseases Acts authorities collected statistics on the decline in the number of prostitutes in the military districts, the cleanliness of registered women and the improved order on the streets in garrison towns and ports. A few sceptical officials and military doctors pointed out that it was likely that many prostitutes had left the towns rather than risk being arrested, examined and sent to hospital. Even if the Act did improve the health of the towns to which it applied, it may have spread the disease further afield as prostitutes moved to unregulated areas. Such views, however, were in the minority.

# The Contagious Diseases Acts 1866 and 1869

In 1866, a second Act widened the scope of the 1862 law so that more military towns were covered. Furthermore, the new Act authorised a 'system of periodic fortnightly inspection or examination of all known prostitutes to be made compulsory, under a well organised system of medical police'. This suggested a more overt system of police control.

A well-known medical expert, William Acton, claimed, in his book *Prostitution* (1870), that venereal disease would weaken the population unless it was checked and he became a keen advocate of the regulation of prostitutes. He said to prostitutes: 'You cannot be prevented from following this sad career which you have chosen; we cannot force you to abstain from vice; but we can and will take care that your shameful lives shall no longer work injury to the health of others, or outrage public decency.'

Among many doctors, military leaders, police and clergy, there was support for regulation to be extended to the new industrial cities of the north like Manchester and Leeds. It would be a way of containing the street disorder associated with prostitution (for example, rowdy public houses) and of alleviating the local cost of treating diseased prostitutes and their children in workhouse infirmaries. Although the regulatory system was never implemented across the north, a third Contagious Diseases Act was passed in 1869. This extended regulation to five additional 'subjected districts' and extended the period of time for which women could be kept in hospital to nine months. It was to be met by mounting resistance.





# The impact of the Acts on prostitutes and ordinary women

How did the Acts affect prostitutes and ordinary women?

William Acton had called for more control over the lives of prostitutes. His views chimed with those of many in the government and the middle classes who were enthusiastic for State intervention in the lives of the poor on medical and sanitary grounds. The 1848 Public Health Act, which authorised local authorities to improve sewerage and water supply, and the introduction of compulsory smallpox vaccination of all new babies in 1853 had led to improvements in public health. Control of prostitutes, as a source of physical and moral pollution, would be an extension of Victorian public health policy. As the historian Paula Bartley wrote: 'Prostitutes were seen as a similar public nuisance to sewage: they should be cleaned, sanitised and made safe for the general public in the same manner as fetid drains.'

The treatment prescribed for prostitutes with venereal disease was mercury, in the form of pills, vapour baths or ointment. The treatment relieved some of the symptoms but rarely provided a cure. (It was not until the mid-twentieth century, with the development of antibiotics, that an effective and reliable cure became widely available.)

The legislation authorised the police to arrest women merely on suspicion of being a prostitute and to have them registered and examined. Once her name was on the register, it could be difficult for a woman to have her name removed unless she left the district or married. Many women were falsely accused of being prostitutes. One was Mrs Percy, a professional singer and actress whose suicide was reported in 1875. She had been falsely accused of prostitution and was then barred from performing at music halls for refusing to submit to examination. She complained of police abuse and intimidation but it made no difference: she lost her job and her reputation, and then took her own life.

One opponent of the legislation attacked the hypocrisy of the sexual double standard, identifying officials responsible for punishing prostitutes as the same men who also bought their sexual services. She told the story of one poor 'unfortunate' who said: 'It did seem hard ma'am, that the Magistrate on the bench who gave the casting vote for my imprisonment had paid me several shillings a day or two before, in the street, to go with him.'

Many reports, compiled by those who were to campaign for the repeal of the Contagious Diseases Acts, told of 'instrumental rape' by men carrying out vaginal inspections, sometimes on completely innocent women. These reports depicted registered women as victims of male lust and medical and police tyranny. They helped to challenge the prevailing social view of prostitutes

as pollutants of men and portrayed them 'as the victims of male pollution, as women who had been invaded by men's bodies, men's laws, and by that "steel penis", the speculum.'

One of those who, in the mid-1860s, began to campaign for the repeal of the Contagious Diseases Acts was **Elizabeth Wolstenholme**. She had been, and continued to be, an ardent campaigner for women's rights. She considered the Acts to be highly discriminatory against women as the legislation contained no sanctions against men. Not only did she stand out against the Acts, she also began to campaign for votes for women in the belief that, when women were enfranchised, they would be in a better position to secure the repeal of such discriminatory legislation. Wolstenholme was to be instrumental in the establishment of a national campaign for repeal (see page 102).

# Summary diagram: The impact of the Acts on prostitutes and ordinary women The control and cleansing of prostitutes as a source of pollution Mercury treatment was rarely a cure Many innocent women were arrested and examined Elizabeth Wolstenholme saw the Acts as discriminating against women

# 4

# The campaign for repeal 1867–86

- How effective was the campaign of the Ladies' National Association?
- How do you explain the eventual repeal of the Contagious Diseases Acts?

The first organisers of the campaign to repeal the Contagious Diseases Acts were dismissed as 'eccentric' or religious fanatics. They faced a wall of ignorance and disbelief: even the most well-read and well-informed people had no idea of the significance of the Acts. At a meeting in Cheltenham in 1870, Reverend W. Allen stated that he 'had no idea until a few weeks ago that the Act had any application other than to cattle' and Edward Baines, MP for Leeds, declared that 'he never knew of a single instance in which a debate took place upon either the Act of 1864, 1866 or 1869'.



### Elizabeth Wolstenholme (1833–1918)

She campaigned for women's rights to higher education, to inherit property and for the vote, as well as for the repeal of the Contagious Diseases Acts.

Nevertheless, by 1880, repealers had won widespread popular appeal, built up a nationwide network of support and, most importantly, gained considerable political influence in Parliament. In 1886 the Acts were repealed. This section will trace and explain the main developments in this transformation.

The first, organised, public agitation was a response to plans, in the mid1860s, to extend the system of regulation to the towns and cities of the north
of England. This agitation took place in the new political climate created by
the passing of the 1867 Reform Act (see page 41). This Act enfranchised many
of the better-off working classes and stimulated a wave of political activism,
especially among middle-class Nonconformists and working-class radicals.
It was also at this time that the first women's suffrage societies were formed. All
of these groups were critical of the medical and military establishment and the
increasing power of central government.

In 1867, Daniel Cooper, the secretary of the Society for the Rescue of Young Women and Children, organised a meeting of the managers of London's female rescue homes, which looked after prostitutes, in order to oppose plans to extend the system of regulation. Their propaganda had little effect and the 1869 Act was passed. However, foundations had been laid. In 1869, the National Association for Repeal of the Contagious Diseases Acts was formed: now the aim was not just to prevent extension of the Acts but to abolish them (hence campaigners were sometimes called 'abolitionists'). Branch associations were formed at public meetings, especially in the Midlands and the north of England. The Association's headquarters were, from 1870, to be in London and were intended to be the legal and parliamentary arm of the movement. However, the Association had only modest success at **lobbying** Parliament and made little headway in mobilising support at election times. Far more effective in mobilising support was the Ladies' National Association.

# The Ladies' National Association (LNA)

A separate association for women, the Ladies' National Association, was formed because, initially, the National Association excluded females. In December 1869, Elizabeth Wolstenholme asked Josephine Butler (see profile on page 104), with whom she had worked to promote women's higher education, to organise the women's campaign.

# The Ladies' Protest: the impact of the Acts on prostitutes and ordinary women

A general committee of the LNA was formed and a Ladies' Protest, signed by 124 members, was published in the *Daily News*.



**Lobbying** An organised attempt by people, with a special interest, to influence lawmakers, for example by putting pressure on MPs.

#### SOURCE D

From the Ladies' Protest, which was published in the *Daily News* in December 1869. It was compiled by members of the Ladies' National Association for the Repeal of the Contagious Diseases Act and was signed by 124 members.

We, the undersigned, enter our solemn protest against these Acts - ...

- 2. Because, so far as women are concerned, they remove every guaranty of personal security which the law has established and held sacred, and put their reputation, their freedom, and their persons absolutely in the power of the police.
- 3. Because the law is bound, in any country professing to give civil liberty to its subjects, to define clearly an offence which it punishes.
- 4. Because it is unjust to punish the sex who are the victims of a vice, and leave unpunished the sex who are the main cause, both of the vice and its dreaded consequences; and we consider that liability to arrest, forced surgical examination, and, where this is resisted, imprisonment with hard labour, to which these Acts subject women, are punishments of the most degrading kind.
- 5. Because, by such a system, the path of evil is made more easy to our sons, and to the whole of the youth of England; inasmuch as a moral restraint is withdrawn the moment the State recognizes and provides convenience for the practice of a vice which it thereby declares to be necessary and venal [something done for money].
- 6. Because these measures are cruel to the women who come under their action, violating the feelings of those whose sense of shame is not wholly lost, and further brutalizing even the most abandoned.
- 7. Because the disease which these Acts seek to remove has never been removed by any such legislation. The advocates of the system have utterly failed to show, by statistics or otherwise, that these regulations have in any case, after several years' trial, and when applied to one sex only, diminished disease, reclaimed the fallen, or improved the general morality of the country. We have, on the contrary, the strongest evidence to show that in Paris and other Continental cities, where women have long been outraged by this forced inspection, the public health and morals are worse than at home.

The Protest caused a sensation and the LNA leaders injected energy and vitality into the repeal campaign. They attracted widespread publicity: the participation of females astonished and perplexed the press and government. The public were not used to women speaking publicly in front of mixed audiences and on issues like prostitution and venereal disease. The press were impressed, even if not always favourably, with the women's courage and tenacity: the *Saturday Review* referred to the 'shrieking sisterhood'. One MP later said: 'We know how to handle any other opposition in the House [of Commons] or in the country,

Study Source D (points I-7). What are the main grounds on which the Acts are being opposed?

6

but this is very awkward for us – this revolt of the women. It is quite a new thing; what are we to do with such an opposition as this?'

# Josephine Butler and the leadership of the LNA

Josephine Butler stood out by force of her personality which, in turn, enabled her to dominate the LNA and guide its policy. She was a gifted speaker who captured the popular imagination and inspired deep loyalty among her co-workers. In her first year, she travelled 3700 miles (6000 km) and addressed 99 meetings. Like many of the leaders on the committee of the LNA she brought a wealth of campaigning experience to the repeal movement. She had championed the rights of women in higher education while many of her colleagues on the LNA committee had been active in the campaign for the abolition of slavery or in moral-force Chartism (see page 80). Butler, again like many of her colleagues, had experience of working with and rescuing prostitutes. In Liverpool, she had taken several into her home and later set up a 'House of Rest' with the help of others.

# Josephine Butler

(LNA)

1828	Born in Northumberland	ро
1851	Married George Butler, an Anglican clergyman	sor mo
1867–73	President of the North of England Council for Promoting the Higher Education of Women	In
1868	Published pamphlet The Education and Employment of Women	and Dis
1869	Edited collection of essays on Women's Work and Women's Culture	im

Became leader of Ladies' National Association

1886 Repeal of the Contagious Diseases Acts1906 Died

Butler gained a love of justice from her father, who supported the abolition of slavery, and a deep evangelical Christian faith from her mother. Her father encouraged her to read about the political and social questions of the day such as the treatment of the poor in workhouses.

Her marriage, in 1851, was described as a 'marriage of equals' and her husband was a strong supporter of her public work. After her daughter died in 1864, she

began to work among the women of the Liverpool workhouse, particularly with prostitutes. She 'became possessed with an irresistible urge to go forth and find some pain keener than my own, to meet with people more unhappy than myself'. In 1866, she set up a House of Rest and an industrial home for poor, young women.

In 1869, she was asked to become secretary of the LNA and lead the campaign for the repeal of the Contagious Diseases Acts. She said: 'It was as a citizen of a free country first, and as a woman secondly, that I felt impelled to come forward.' She saw the campaign as a popular crusade against both vice and social injustice.

She was a genuinely charismatic leader. Men, as well as women, responded to her magnetic appeal, even those who disagreed with her. After she had spoken before the Royal Commission in 1871, one member of the commission remarked: 'I cannot give you any idea of the effect produced except by saying that the spirit of God was there.'

After spearheading the repeal campaign to its successful conclusion in 1886, Butler continued to campaign for women's causes, particularly for education and the vote. She is now considered to have invented many of the strategies that would later be used by the suffragettes (see page 114).

Not only did many of the LNA leaders have considerable experience of rescue work and political campaigning, many of them were committed feminists. While recognising that the women's sphere was in the home, Butler called for the diffusion of the 'home influence' across society as a whole. Butler celebrated the female form of philanthropy, 'the independent, individual ministering, the home influence' as opposed to the masculine, 'the organisation, the system planned by men and sanctioned by Parliament'. She was always hostile to the social and political elite in London, particularly the military and medical men who had advocated the regulation of prostitutes.

# The leadership of the LNA

The leaders of the LNA mostly came from affluent, middle-class backgrounds. Many had been educated, by parents or governesses, and they had the time, the financial independence and the moral and political commitment to devote their energy to the repeal movement. Many of them felt a special sense of obligation to represent and defend the interests of working women. At the LNA's annual conference in 1876, Mrs Steward of Ongar explained:

#### **SOURCE E**

From a speech by Mrs Steward of Ongar at the LNA's annual conference in 1876, quoted in Judith Walkowitz, *Prostitution and Victorian Society*, Cambridge University Press, 1982, p. 119.

When I think ... what we women who are in easy circumstances owe to working women – that our clothes are made by them, washed by them; our food cooked by them, our children nursed by them etc. I cannot understand how we can bear not to pay back, to the best of our power, the debt we owe to them. The wages we pay them are but a poor part of the debt we owe! And where is our justice, our gratitude, if we can stand by and see a terrible wrong done ... to them who cannot speak for themselves if we do not rise up and speak for them.

As well as a keen social conscience, many brought a religious fervour to the movement: several LNA leaders were evangelical Christians for whom the social gospel directed them to 'make the world a more suitable place to which Christ should return.'

Butler saw her role as to 'breathe a little fire and courage into individual workers and so gradually to influence a good many.' She admitted she had no 'head for organisation'. Fortunately, she had many devoted, strong-minded and hardworking colleagues. Furthermore, there was also a nationwide network of repeal organisations, involving both men and women, with many provincial and local branches.

Study Source E. For what reasons does Mrs Steward believe she and her colleagues should stand up for working women?

# **O**

#### **KEY FIGURE**

#### Henry Wilson (1833–1914)

A regional and national leader of the repeal campaign and later a Liberal MP.

# Nationwide repeal agitation

In the years 1872-3, a number of regional electoral leagues were organised in order to press for repeal during parliamentary and local elections. The main ones were the Northern Counties League and the Midlands Electoral League. Many different Christian denominations, such as the Quakers, organised their own repeal groups. Most of the regional leaders, like those of the LNA, were middle class, often industrialists and merchants, who saw themselves as 'outsiders' in opposition to the London 'establishment' that supported the Contagious Diseases Acts. Many were active supporters of the Liberal Party, often radical and overwhelmingly Nonconformist. The most effective was Henry Wilson, leader of the Northern Counties League. He was a brilliant organiser and, at the national level, he cultivated the support of the Liberal Party. Like Butler, he criticised the National Association as 'do nothings'. Historian Paula Bartley has written of Wilson: 'Working backstage without the glamour of Butler's crusade, Wilson was a workhorse who provided the backbone to the campaign waged by the LNA and deserves as much credit as Butler in the successful repeal of the [Contagious Diseases Acts]."

The repeal movement was not, by any means, exclusively middle class in its membership and, in 1875, a Working Men's National League was established. However, there were distinct differences, sometimes rivalries, between repeal organisations, on the basis of class and, above all, gender. Men and women formed separate organisations and developed distinctive methods of agitation. Nevertheless, whatever their political differences, male and female, middle-class and working-class repealers were united in their hatred of 'profligate [immoral] aristocrats' who, they believed, dominated the government, the military and also the medical profession.

The movement depended on financial support from a number of individuals and organisations. Much came from Nonconformist, especially Quaker, businessmen and, eventually, from influential trade union leaders and an increasing number of the medical profession.

# The methods of campaigning

A variety of campaigning strategies were used. Petitioning was used widely as it was the only constitutional way by which women, who were unable to vote, could influence Parliament. Between 1870 and 1886, 18,000 petitions, signed by over 2.5 million people, were presented to Parliament. Public meetings were held in churches, town halls and working men's clubs, especially in the north and Midlands. In preparation for the meetings, both voluntary and paid agents distributed posters and put adverts in local papers. Then, after the meetings, they would collect signatures for petitions to Parliament.

The most successful tactic, both as a way of demonstrating popular support and of embarrassing the Liberal government, was challenging Liberal candidates at

by-elections. Twice in 1870, repealers opposed **Henry Storks** when he stood for election to Parliament. He had implemented a system for regulating prostitutes when governor of the British colony of Malta and he was closely associated with military men in the government. When he stood in the Colchester by-election in autumn of 1870, male and female repealers put up placards around the town highlighting a statement which Storks had made in support of a plan to subject soldiers' wives, not the soldiers themselves, to the Acts. A poster distributed in the town mocked him with a poem, the last verse of which was:

Contagious Diseases are bad, King Stork;
But tyranny's worse than disease, King Stork:
So off to your bogs,
And your own native frogs,
For we won't be swallowed by you, King Stork!

The repealers were successful and Storks was defeated. Josephine Butler's activities during the by-election contributed to the increasing support for repeal. However, she was chased by a crowd of brothel-keepers and had to hide in a cellar. On another occasion, she had flour and excrement thrown at her. Local public opinion was outraged by these attacks while Butler appeared as a heroine who refused to be deterred by abuse.

The Shield, the newspaper of the LNA, publicised cases of women who had been persecuted by the Contagious Diseases Acts. None had more impact than the report of the suicide of Mrs Percy (see page 100). It provided the repeal movement with its first martyr and re-energised the movement at a time when, in the face of continuing Parliamentary indifference, it was fading. Both politicians and public were bombarded by repealers with colourful propaganda attacking regulationists. One pamphlet cited the 'medical lust of handling and dominating women', matched by the 'police lust of hunting and persecuting women'.

Occasionally, LNA activists did acknowledge that some registered women were experienced prostitutes who had chosen to go on the streets. But they stressed the casual nature of prostitution as a temporary occupation for women who were destitute. They argued that it was the regulation system that stigmatised them and prevented them from finding alternative respectable employment.

# Parliamentary support for the repeal of the Acts

Since only Parliament could repeal the Contagious Diseases Acts it was crucial to win the support of MPs. **Private members' bills** were regularly introduced in Parliament but, lacking substantial support in the main parties, the Liberals and the Conservatives, they were not passed. Other issues, like Ireland, the Empire and education, were given priority.

Following the success of the repealers in defeating Henry Storks, the Liberal candidate in the Chichester by-election in 1870, the Liberal government set up



#### Henry Storks (1811-74)

A high-ranking army officer who stood for Parliament in 1870. He was a strong supporter of the Contagious Diseases Acts.



#### Private member's bill

A parliamentary bill put forward by an individual MP.



#### **KEY FIGURE**

### James Stansfeld (1820–98)

Liberal MP and Cabinet minister who used his expertise and influence, both inside and outside Parliament, to strengthen the repeal campaign. an inquiry but its report, six months later, favoured extension, not repeal, of the Acts, stating: 'There is no comparison to be made between the prostitute and the men who consort with them. With the one sex the offence is committed as a matter of gain; with the other it is the irregular indulgence of a natural impulse.'

Fortunately for the repealers, the Acts were not extended: the cost and practical difficulties of implementing the Acts in big cities were seen as prohibitive. By the early 1870s, there was a growing number of Liberal MPs who favoured repeal. In 1874, the Liberal government was defeated in a general election and it was feared that the momentum for repeal might be lost. However, this proved to be a turning point for the movement because the Liberal defeat relieved James Stansfeld, an advocate of repeal, from his responsibilities as a Cabinet minister. He now lent his full support to repeal and, because of his high profile and political experience, the press took note. *The Times* was worried that such an eminent figure identified himself with 'the hysterical crusade' against the Contagious Diseases Acts but he responded with humour, writing to Josephine Butler that he hoped 'to be the best abused man in England within twelve months'. (Many men, and some women, believed that hysteria – uncontrolled excitement – was a particularly female characteristic.)

# The leadership of James Stansfeld

Stansfeld assumed national leadership of the movement and set about making it a more effective pressure group. More electoral leagues were established and there was a drive to win over more working men and residents of the subjected districts. Above all, Stansfeld decided to 'beat supporters [of the Acts] on their own ground': more 'facts', more scientific and medical statistics, would be collected on venereal disease among the military in subjected districts to show that the Acts failed to control the spread of the disease. Stansfeld encouraged the formation of the National Medical Association in 1875 in order to enlist the support of doctors.

In 1879, the Conservative government responded to increased lobbying and appointed another committee of inquiry. When the Liberals returned to power in 1880, Stansfeld was made a member. Many medical experts testified, both for and against the medical benefits of the Acts. Yet there was stalemate and no agreed recommendations. However, there was surging support for repeal in the early 1880s. Inside Parliament there was an increasing number of Liberal MPs, especially newly elected radical ones, who were committed to repeal and other moral issues. Outside Parliament, there was growing support for repeal in working men's clubs in the east end of London and among middle-class women in the more affluent parts of the capital.

# The repeal of the Acts

A further boost came when Henry Wilson, now an MP, and fellow campaigners in the regional leagues helped to create a political committee of Liberal MPs

to push for repeal in Parliament. The stage was set for Stansfeld, in 1883, to introduce a motion in the House of Commons that 'the House disapproves of the compulsory examination of women under the Contagious Diseases Acts'. It was passed by 182 to 110. Compulsory examinations had to be suspended, thus making the Acts unworkable.

Parliament was still preoccupied with, and also prioritised, other business and most of the military and medical establishment was opposed to repeal. However, the Acts were ineffective without compulsory examination. Opposition to repeal was worn down, some said by the constant petitioning and 'disgusting literature' with which opponents were bombarded. The Acts were finally repealed in 1886.

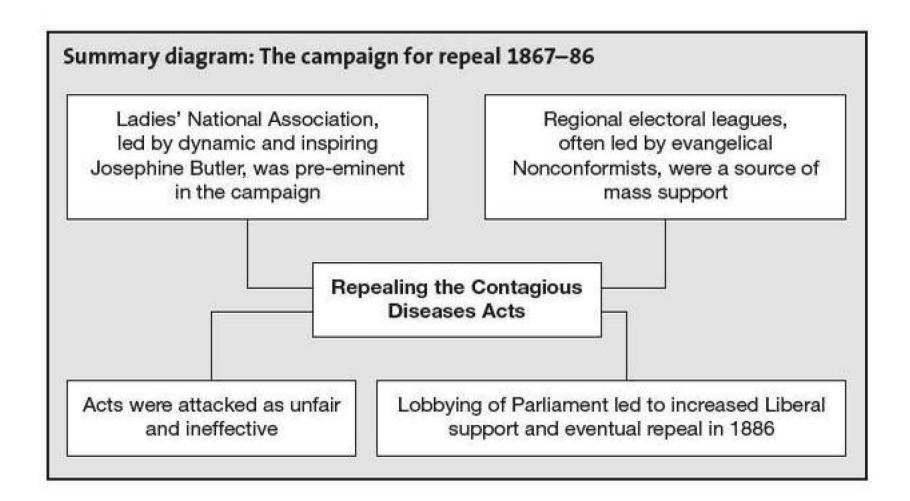
# The success and significance of the repeal campaign

The campaign of protest and agitation was a complete success. No one individual is more responsible for this success than Josephine Butler. Her courage and commitment, her passion and powers of persuasion were second to none, male or female, either in the movement or, arguably, in the whole of the nineteenth century. With the support of equally committed and hard-working colleagues in the LNA, she was able to build support across both class and gender lines. As historian Judith Walkowitz writes, she showed a 'genuine respect and sympathy for working people that was entirely reciprocated'. She invoked the fury and won the support of working men whose wives and daughters might be unjustly arrested and accused under the Acts. Furthermore, she challenged the double standard which justified male access to 'impure' women while pointing out that men could still contaminate their innocent wives.

Although Butler and the LNA were pre-eminent in the campaign, many other organisations and their leaders helped to make it into a mass, nationwide movement. The electoral leagues, especially in the north and the Midlands, campaigned vigorously. Here Henry Wilson played a crucially important organising role, as he later did, as an MP, when in Parliament.

And, of course, only Parliament could repeal the Acts. Lobbying by repealers found an increasingly supportive body of, mostly, Nonconformist, radical, Liberal MPs, chief among whom was James Stansfeld. Many of them, like many thousands nationwide, were inspired by the 'social gospel' and were 'bent on saving not only the individual, but also society'. For these MPs, for Butler and many in the LNA and the leagues, there was also a desire to strike a blow for 'outsiders' against what many of them saw as the 'decadent upper classes'. Armed with their evidence that suggested that the legislation was ineffective in halting the spread of venereal disease, Parliament was persuaded to repeal the Acts.

The success of the campaign for the repeal of the Contagious Diseases Acts inspired many more who fought for women's rights, none more so than those striving to achieve the parliamentary vote for women.



prostitute' and then have her subjected -examination. This punished innocent women as well prostitute' and then have her subjected to medical

Chapter summary

as prostitutes and led to a concerted campaign of resistance.

Elizabeth Wolstenholme invited Josephine Butler to lead the Ladies' National Association which spearheaded the campaign for repeal while nationwide agitation was also built up by electoral leagues and many other, often evangelically inspired, organisations. Petitioning, meetings, intervention in by-elections and widespread propaganda were all used to advance the cause. Ultimately, it was the Gontagious Diseases Acts. This legislation authorised the police to pick up any woman, in specified towns and ports, who was suspected of being a 'common prostitute' and then have her subjected to medical



# Refresher questions

Use these questions to remind yourself of the key material covered in this chapter.

- What were the main causes of prostitution in Victorian Britain?
- 2 Why were the Victorians so worried about prostitution?
- 3 Why were the Contagious Diseases Acts passed?
- 4 What was the impact of the Acts on prostitutes and ordinary women?
- 5 What was the role of Elizabeth Wolstenholme in the campaign for the repeal of the Acts?

- 6 What was the impact of the Ladies' National Association?
- 7 Why was Josephine Butler's leadership of the Ladies' National Association so effective?
- 8 Who supported the regional leagues in the campaign for repeal of the Contagious Diseases Acts?
- 9 What were the chief methods of campaigning for repeal?
- 10 How important was the role played by James Stansfeld in the campaign for repeal?
- II Why were the Acts finally repealed in 1886?



# Question practice

#### **ESSAY QUESTIONS**

- 1 'Without the leadership of Josephine Butler, the Contagious Diseases Acts would not have been repealed in 1886.' How far do you agree with this statement?
- 2 'The Ladies' National Association played a more important role than that of any other organisation or individual in the campaign for the repeal of the Contagious Diseases Acts in 1886.' How far do you agree with this statement?
- 3 To what extent do you agree that a nationwide, grassroots movement was the key to the repeal of the Contagious Diseases Acts in 1886?
- 4 'The contribution of James Stansfeld was more important than that of Josephine Butler in the repeal of the Contagious Diseases Acts in 1886.' How far do you agree with this statement?

#### SOURCE ANALYSIS QUESTION

1 Assess the value of Source D (page 103) for revealing the arguments put forward by the Ladies' National Association for the repeal of the Contagious Diseases Acts. Explain your answer using the source, the information given about its origin and your own knowledge about the historical context.

# The Women's Social and Political Union 1903–14

In February 1918, a few months before the end of the First World War, women over the age of 30 were granted the right to vote. However, the campaign for female suffrage (the right to vote) had reached its height in the years before the war. So why had the campaign not been successful before 1914? This question and, more specifically, the role of the Women's Social and Political Union (WSPU), is the principal focus of this chapter. This is explained through the following themes:

- ★ The National Union of Women's Suffrage Societies (NUWSS) and votes for women 1897–1903
- ★ The Women's Social and Political Union (WSPU) 1903-14
- ★ The WSPU and the Liberal government 1906–14

The key debate on page 127 of this chapter asks the question: Was the militancy of the WSPU the main reason why women were not enfranchised by 1914?

Key dates				
1897	National Union of Women's Suffrage Societies (NUWSS) formed	1911		Failure of second Conciliation Bill Resumption of WSPU violence
1903	Women's Social and Political Union (WSPU) founded	1913	April	'Cat and Mouse Act'
1905	More militant strategy of heckling adopted by WSPU			Emmeline Pankhurst sentenced to three years' imprisonment
1909	First hunger strikes and forcible feeding Failure of first Conciliation Bill		Nov.	Emily Davison died after falling under the king's horse at the Derby
Nov.	'Black Friday' police violence towards women outside Parliament	1914		Suffragettes suspended militancy at outbreak of First World War



# The National Union of Women's Suffrage Societies (NUWSS) and votes for women 1897–1903



What were the arguments and tactics of the suffragists?

In the later nineteenth century, women experienced a number of significant improvements to their lives. So, for example, by 1900, all children had access to free schooling up to the age of thirteen and more women were being admitted to higher education and to the professions. However, although they were able to become doctors, the law and banking were still closed to women. Many women believed that gaining the right to vote and enter Parliament would enable them to have more opportunities and achieve greater equality.

The women's suffrage movement initially took off in the 1860s, in the same decade as the Ladies' National Association campaign to repeal the Contagious Diseases Acts (see page 101). A petition, signed by 1500 women, was presented to Parliament in 1866 and, over the next 30 years, numerous suffrage societies were set up. In 1897, the National Union of Women's Suffrage Societies (NUWSS) was formed to unite all the various suffrage organisations. Their members were known as suffragists and, by the end of the nineteenth century, they appeared to be strong and united, with branches across Britain. Before the outbreak of war in 1914, there were 400 suffrage societies in Britain.



#### KEY TERM

Suffragists Women who sought the vote using peaceful means.

Table 7.1 is a summary of the main arguments for and against votes for women.

Table 7.1 A summary of the main arguments given at the time for and against votes for women

#### Arguments for votes for women Arguments against votes for women Some property-owning women can, and do, vote in The role of women is within the home, looking after their local elections, and serve on education boards and as husbands and children. Poor Law guardians, so they should have the vote in Giving women the vote will lead them to neglect their national elections and serve on national bodies. family duties. Some women are highly educated, work as doctors and Women have a huge, indirect, influence, through their teachers, and pay taxes like men so they should be husbands, on the politics of the country anyway so they able to vote. do not need the vote. Women already have the vote in Australia and New The interests of women are represented by their fathers, Zealand and that has not led to disaster! husbands and sons in Parliament. Women are experts in education and the home so they Some women have already been granted the vote in can help Parliament make better laws on these issues. local elections and are doing good work in local If women enter Parliament, they will be able to push for government, which is women's proper sphere because laws to improve women's economic position (for it involves education, health and housing. example, access to more jobs) and social status (for Women do not fight in wars for their country so they example, equal rights within marriage). Thus the vote should not have a say on questions of war and peace will enable women to end the exploitation of their sex and whether the country should go to war. and achieve equality.

# **(3)**

#### **KEY TERMS**

#### Women's Social and Political Union (WSPU)

Founded in 1903 by Emmeline Pankhurst to campaign for votes for women. They were more militant than the suffragists of the NUWSS.

Suffragettes Women who sought the vote using more confrontational, sometimes violent, means. The term was first used by a journalist in the Daily Mail.

Only Parliament could pass laws to give women the vote so suffragists focused much of their campaigning on persuading individual MPs to support women's suffrage. They petitioned Parliament to demonstrate increasing support for women's suffrage and lobbied MPs. In election campaigns, they worked for those who were in favour of votes for women. For instance, they produced and distributed leaflets in support of those candidates.

However, because none of the political parties adopted women's suffrage as official policy, the suffragists had to rely on sympathetic MPs to put forward private members' bills for women's suffrage. Such bills were introduced almost every year in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. Much of the comment made in parliamentary debate consisted of poking fun at the suffragists or was downright hostile and not one bill was ever passed. This was one of the main reasons why, in 1903, the **Women's Social and Political Union (WSPU)** was set up. Their members became known as **suffragettes**.



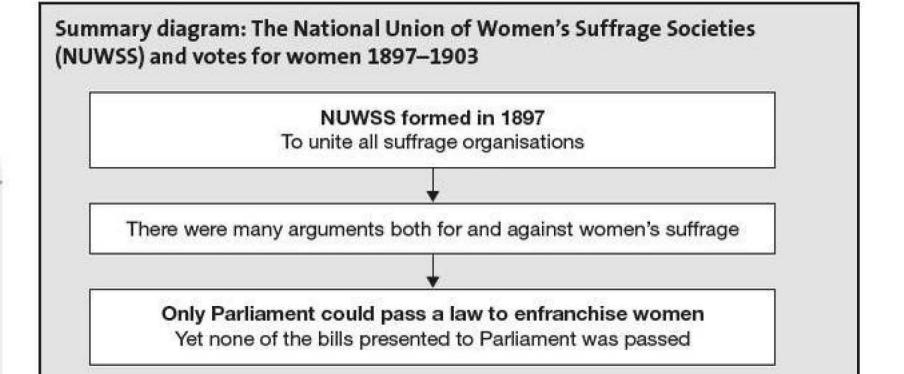
#### **KEY FIGURES**

#### Christabel Pankhurst (1880–1958)

Eldest daughter of Emmeline Pankhurst. She had a law degree but, as a woman, she could not practise. Became chief organiser of the WSPU and was imprisoned three times. Fled to Paris in 1912 to escape arrest and imprisonment.

### Sylvia Pankhurst (1882–1960)

Second daughter of Emmeline Pankhurst.
Organised the working-class branch of the WSPU, which was run on democratic lines. Imprisoned several times, went on hunger strikes and was force-fed. Expelled from the WSPU in 1914 for not following its principles.



# 2

# The Women's Social and Political Union (WSPU) 1903–14

- How was the WSPU organised?
- ► How and why did the WSPU become more militant?

The WSPU was founded by Emmeline Pankhurst (see profile on page 116) and her daughters, **Christabel** and **Sylvia**. They were frustrated by years of defeat for the suffrage campaign and wanted to form a more effective political machine. The Pankhurst family was steeped in the radical politics of Manchester, its hometown, and, even as children, Christabel and Sylvia had been taken to meetings of the Independent Labour Party (ILP) by their parents.

However, Emmeline and her daughters became disillusioned with their local Labour Party: several of its male members were lukewarm in their support for women's suffrage and the Pankhursts' disillusionment deepened in 1903. In that year, a building was to be opened in memory of Emmeline's husband, Richard, who had died five years before. It was to be the headquarters of the local branch of the ILP. However, it was to be open only to men.

# The leadership of the WSPU

When the WSPU was formed, it included many women who were wives of ILP members but the decision was made that the new organisation would be independent of any male political party and that its membership would be all female. It would also adopt a more confrontational approach than the suffragists of the NUWSS.

#### **SOURCE A**



Study Source A. What messages are conveyed by this source?





"Her children shall rise up and call her blessed."

The cover of *The*Suffragette newspaper,
17 January 1913.

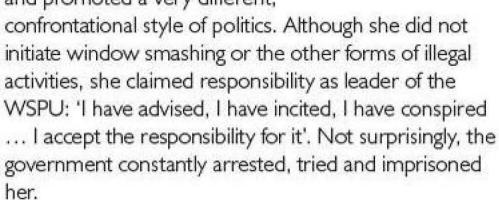
# Emmeline Pankhurst

1858	Born as Emmeline Goulden
1879	Married radical lawyer Richard Pankhurst
1903	WSPU founded
1908	Imprisoned for the first time
1913	Sentenced to three years in prison
1914	Abandoned campaign for the vote at start of the First World War
1926	Adopted as a Conservative candidate but failed to be elected
1928	Died

Emmeline Pankhurst is one of the most fascinating and controversial women in modern British history. There is a statue of her outside the House of Commons, a portrait of her in the National Portrait Gallery and a Pankhurst Centre built from one of her former homes in Manchester.

She was involved in political activity throughout her adult life: she was a Poor Law guardian, a member of the Manchester School Board and a founding member of the Manchester Independent Labour Party, and was active in four different suffrage societies at the turn of the century.

In 1903, frustrated that women were no nearer to being given the vote, she founded the Women's Social and Political Union (WSPU) and promoted a very different,



By 1914, she was refusing to eat, drink or sleep after being imprisoned. The government, fearful of public criticism, never force-fed her but released her from prison when her health was critical and she had the 'odour of malnutrition' about her.

On the outbreak of the First World War, Emmeline Pankhurst ceased campaigning for the vote and instead worked closely with her former enemy, Lloyd George, to promote the war effort. In 1926, she was adopted as Conservative candidate for the working-class district of Whitechapel.

The leaders of the WSPU (as with the leadership of the Ladies' Association which campaigned against the Contagious Diseases Act) were mostly from affluent, middle-class families. They were usually married to wealthy men or came from monied backgrounds (a fact that is frequently pointed out by historians), although the leaders of most men's political organisations at that time were also well off. The WSPU relied on unpaid work so its members had to be economically independent if they were to devote themselves to campaigning.

The WSPU has been criticised for being elitist. One of its leading figures, Lady Constance Lytton, came from a highly aristocratic background while another, Emmeline Pethwick-Lawrence, was wealthy enough to donate large sums of money to the WSPU. However, the WSPU, with its origins in the Labour politics of the north of England, recruited many working-class (as well as middle-class) women who did valuable propaganda work in the textile towns, while Sylvia Pankhurst established the WSPU branch in the working-class east end of London.

# The organisation of the WSPU

The WSPU was run in a highly authoritarian, top-down manner. From 1906, its policies were decided by an unelected Central Committee dominated by the Pankhursts. This Central Committee was advised and assisted by a group which consisted mostly of family and friends of the Pankhursts. The Central Committee controlled all publications and the finances of the organisation. There was little debate and discussion among members of the WSPU, which led one suffragette to comment that, although Emmeline Pankhurst 'wishes women to have votes she will not allow them to have opinions'. Although this dictatorial, autocratic style of leadership led to splits (see page 125), it has been explained, if not necessarily defended, by recent historians:

- Emmeline Pankhurst had experienced many years of argument and discussion in the nineteenth-century suffrage movement and wanted to control 'her' organisation to prevent disagreements getting in the way of action. 'Deeds, not words was to be our permanent motto', said Emmeline Pankhurst.
- There was no official membership list and anyone could attend a WSPU meeting. Many suffragettes told of how much they had learnt, in terms of public speaking and political awareness, from WSPU leaders. Many members showed unquestioning loyalty to the two leading Pankhursts, Emmeline and Christabel.
- Many local branches enjoyed considerable autonomy and much of the later militant action was initiated at local level.
- Both Emmeline and Christabel Pankhurst argued that a democratic organisation was less appropriate for their kind of politics. As they embarked on more militant and illegal tactics and the government became more hostile, so quick responses (rather than debate and discussion) and secret, militarystyle planning became necessary. The WSPU needed to be a strong fighting force.

## SOURCE B

From an article written by Christabel Pankhurst, published in the first edition of Votes for Women, the suffragette newspaper, in October 1907, quoted in Paula Bartley, Votes for Women, Hodder Education, 2007.

If you have any pettiness or personal ambition, you must leave that behind before you come to this movement that is dedicated to one end: the immediate gaining of the vote for women. There must be no conspiracies, no double-dealing in our ranks. Everyone must fulfil her part. The founders and leaders of the movement must lead, the officers must carry out their instructions, the rank and file must loyally share the burdens of the fight. There is no compulsion to come into our ranks, but those who come must be as soldiers ready to march onwards into battle.

Study Source B. What did Christabel Pankhurst demand of the WSPU's members? In what ways does
Source C contrast with
Source B in its
characterisation of the
WSPU?



#### **KEY FIGURE**

## Annie Kenney (1879–1953)

From a northern, workingclass background, she worked in a cotton mill until she became a paid organiser of the WSPU. She was sent to prison four times. She took charge of the London-based WSPU when Christabel Pankhurst was in exile.

#### SOURCE C

#### From the WSPU Annual Report, 1908.

In all parts of London and in many provincial centres, there exist local Unions which, while working in close and harmonious relation with the National headquarters, are independent in the sense that they elect their own committees, and administer their own funds ... and arrange their own schemes of organisation and propaganda.

# The beginnings of militancy

For the first two years of its existence, the WSPU adopted the conventional, peaceful forms of protest used by other suffrage societies: holding public meetings, distributing leaflets, petitioning Parliament and writing letters. In fact, it should not be forgotten that the majority of suffragettes adhered to constitutional, peaceful methods throughout their years of campaigning. Like the NUWSS, they held large meetings in London and cities across Britain. They also held regular meetings of 'The Women's Parliament' in Caxton Hall, opposite the House of Commons.

However, in 1905, the WSPU adopted a more militant strategy and, from 1908 onwards, it resorted to a variety of law-breaking, often violent, actions. In May 1905, another one of the many bills for women's suffrage was talked out in Parliament: MPs actually debated, with apparent seriousness, a measure to compel carts on the road to carry rear lights. They did this in order to avoid giving time to a women's suffrage bill. For the WSPU leaders this was the last straw, a sure sign that the politics of persuasion would not work. They would have to *force* the government to grant women the vote.

In October, Christabel Pankhurst and **Annie Kenney** interrupted the speeches of two leading Liberal Party politicians at an election rally in Manchester. They were ejected from the meeting. They addressed the crowd outside and Christabel deliberately courted arrest and spat at a policeman. Charged with disorderly conduct, both chose prison rather than fines. Thus, they gained what they most wanted: publicity. Suddenly, 'militant' action was front-page news in a way it had not been before. The WSPU began to attract bigger audiences and their membership rose too.

The heckling of the speeches of leading politicians became common. The hecklers were arrested, refused to pay fines and were imprisoned. Each incident brought with it publicity and increased membership. Winston Churchill, a senior member of the Liberal government after 1906, had his speeches interrupted several times and the WSPU claimed a great victory when he lost his parliamentary seat in a Manchester by-election. When Churchill became MP for Dundee and was due to speak at a meeting in the city, the suffragettes hid in

a nearby building so that they could throw stones at the windows in the roof's skylight. In other surprise acts, some were lowered into political meetings at the end of ropes or leapt out of innocent-looking furniture vans.

# The reasons for increasing militancy

To some of their opponents, the increasingly disruptive, and later more violent, methods adopted by the WSPU were a reflection of the unstable nature of women generally and of their fanatical and hysterical tendencies, proof that women should not be granted the vote. However, the suffragettes argued differently:

#### SOURCE D

From a speech by Emmeline Pankhurst in front of the magistrates in London, 1908, quoted in D. Murphy, G. Goodlad and R. Staton, *Britain 1895–1951*, Collins, 2008, p. 26.

We have tried every way. We have presented larger petitions than were ever presented before any reform, we have succeeded in holding greater public meetings than men have ever had for any reform. We have faced hostile mobs at street corners, because we were told that we could not have that representation for our taxes that men have won unless we converted the whole country to our side. Because we have done this we have been misrepresented, we have been ridiculed ...

Well, sir, that is all I have to say to you. We are not here because we are law-breakers, we are here in our efforts to become law-makers!

Other reasons for militancy put forward by the suffragettes included:

- It was a reaction to the repressive measures taken by the Liberal government, from 1906 onwards, such as excluding women from public meetings and refusing to meet suffrage deputations, which denied suffragettes the main form of peaceful demonstration.
- It was the only realistic option left now that peaceful protest was curbed.
- Later, they would claim that it was retaliation against a government which encouraged police brutality and imprisoned and force-fed those who engaged in direct action; that is, it was a response to the use of force by the authorities.
- They believed they were following a long and respected tradition of protest.
   Physical force had been used before the passing of the 1832 and 1867 Reform Acts. Similarly, the Chartists had used both moral and physical force in their campaigns.

The WSPU believed that the government would give women the vote only if forced to do so. In 1911, the miners called for violence and were successful in gaining better pay and conditions.

Study Source D. For what reasons, according to Emmeline Pankhurst, has the WSPU become more militant?

It has often been thought that suffragette violence was ordered and directed by the leaders of the WSPU, in particular by Emmeline Pankhurst and her elder daughter, Christabel. However, as the historian Sandra Holton has shown, the use of violence often began at local level: breaking windows, arson and letter burning were often initiated by local activists and were only adopted by the WSPU leadership when such actions received wide support among members. Every time Emmeline Pankhurst was imprisoned, members of the WSPU resorted to acts of violence, the most widespread following her imprisonment in April 1913:

- Several houses were burned down.
- A grandstand at Ayr racecourse was burned down.
- A bomb exploded at a railway station.
- Telephone wires were cut.
- Several paintings in Manchester Art Gallery were damaged.
- Letters in pillar boxes were destroyed.

Not surprisingly, the destructive methods of the WSPU have been the subject of much historical debate. The government's response to this turn to violence will be explained later. However, both suffragists and suffragettes continued to use the traditional, peaceful forms of protest such as petitioning Parliament and lobbying MPs.

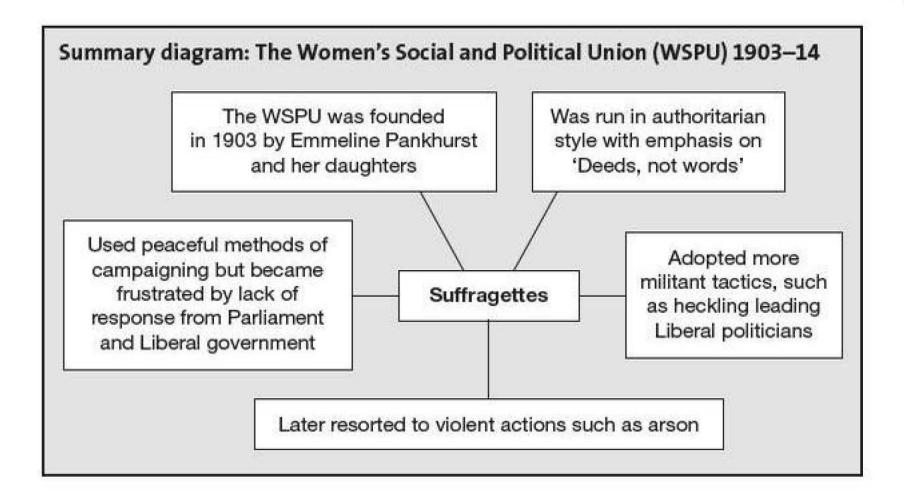
# The continuation of peaceful campaigning

Campaigners for votes for women also adopted very colourful, even playful, forms of campaigning. In 1911, in honour of the new king, George V, suffragettes and suffragists jointly organised a Coronation procession. Many WSPU members dressed in the suffragette colours of green, white and purple (and NUWSS in their colours of red, white and green). To add to the dramatic appearance and sense of fun, some dressed as famous women like Joan of Arc or Elizabeth I. Some suffragette ex-prisoners wore prison uniform. Demonstrators carried huge banners, marched behind bands and sang the suffrage song, 'The March of the Women'.

#### **The Conciliation Committee**

In 1910, both suffragists and suffragettes cooperated with the Conciliation Committee in Parliament. This committee, made up of a small number of MPs from all the main parties, was formed to gather support across party lines for votes for women. The Conciliation Committee drafted a private member's bill to extend the parliamentary franchise to women (householders). A similar Conciliation Bill was introduced in Parliament in 1911. The different suffrage societies lobbied MPs and held meetings to increase the pressure on MPs to vote for the bills. While negotiations were in progress, the WSPU called a truce.

However, both bills failed to become law. When the government announced that it would introduce its own Franchise Bill to extend the male franchise, the prime minister, **Herbert Asquith**, indicated that it might be possible to add an amendment that extended the vote to women. In the event, in early 1913, the speaker of the House of Commons ruled that such an amendment could not be added. Asquith, who was stubbornly opposed to women's suffrage, wrote that it was 'a great relief'. The WSPU resumed its campaign of militancy.



# **KEY FIGURE**

# Herbert Asquith (1852–1928)

Liberal home secretary 1892–5, chancellor of the exchequer 1905–8, prime minister 1908–16.



# The WSPU and the Liberal government 1906–14

How did the Liberal government respond to the actions of the suffragettes?

Most of the Liberal Party members agreed with women's suffrage, so when the Liberals won a landslide victory in 1906, after twenty years of Conservative rule, the women's suffrage movement was optimistic that votes for women would soon be won. This was not to be the case. Time after time the Liberal government refused to support reform bills and, in response to increased WSPU militancy, it restricted suffragette freedom.

When the WSPU began its illegal activities, the Liberal government reacted by denying them democratic forms of protest. The home secretary, Herbert Gladstone, said that to compromise with such a group would be 'an exhibition of weakness in the face of these threats'. In an attempt to stop potential disruption, women were forbidden to attend Liberal meetings unless they held a signed

ticket. The government refused to meet deputations or accept petitions, banned meetings in public places and censored the press in an attempt to silence the WSPU. On one occasion, in 1908, a deputation of suffragettes were refused a meeting with the prime minister and were then assaulted by the crowd that had gathered outside Parliament. In their exasperation, two of the women smashed windows at 10 Downing Street. Later incidents of window smashing were, as in 1908, usually a response to government intransigence. For instance, when Asquith rejected a second Conciliation Bill for women's suffrage, in November 1911, WSPU members reacted immediately by breaking windows in several government buildings in London.

The commissioner of police, directed by the Home Office, refused to allow suffragettes to hold meetings in any London parks and persuaded the management at the Albert Hall not to let it out to suffragettes. When the WSPU managed to hire a different venue, the owner of the hall was threatened with the withdrawal of his licence. The government also prosecuted the printers of *The Suffragette*, raided the offices and homes of the WSPU members and eventually forced Christabel Pankhurst to flee to Paris, where she directed the movement from exile.

## Black Friday, 18 November 1910

On some occasions the government acted even more harshly towards the suffragettes. As home secretary in charge of law and order, Winston Churchill was held responsible for the notorious police violence towards women on Friday 18 November 1910, later termed 'Black Friday' by the suffragettes. On this day, approximately 300 suffragettes marched to the House of Commons in protest at the failure of the first Conciliation Bill. When they tried to enter Parliament, the police responded harshly. The police had been brought in from the poorer east end of London and were not used to dealing with suffragette demonstrations. Instructed not to arrest the suffragettes, they forced them back and, according to the testimony of many present, they kicked them, twisted their breasts, punched their noses and thrust knees between their legs.

# Imprisonment of suffragettes

Between 1906 and 1914 over 1000 suffragettes were imprisoned for breaking the law. Initially, suffragette prisoners were given 'First Division' treatment: they were awarded the status of political prisoners, and so allowed to wear their own clothes and receive food parcels. After 1908, however, women were placed in the 'Second Division' because the government regarded them as criminals, so they lost their privileges and were treated as ordinary prisoners.

Prisoners had to remain silent, were locked in separate cells, were forced to wear ill-fitting, uncomfortable prison uniforms and were referred to by their prison numbers rather than their names. Contact with the outside world was limited

and censored. The historian June Purvis argues that this regime was designed to undermine the suffragettes by eroding their sense of personal identity. It certainly elicited much public sympathy for the imprisoned suffragettes.

Eventually, in March 1910, Churchill responded to public pressure and ruled that suffragette prisoners should be allowed to receive visitors and letters, to have a supply of books and to wear their own clothes. Nevertheless, they were not granted the status of political prisoners.

# Hunger strikes and forcible feeding

In July 1909, Wallace Dunlop, a suffragette prisoner, refused to be treated as a common criminal and went on hunger strike in order to secure her rights as a political prisoner. After 91 hours she was released and Christabel Pankhurst claimed a suffragette victory.

#### **SOURCE E**

### From The Lancet, a medical journal, on 12 August 1912.

Prisoners were held down by force, flung on the floor, tied to chairs and iron bedsteads ... while the tube was forced up the nostrils. After each feeding the nasal pain gets worse. The wardress endeavoured to make the prisoner open her mouth by sawing the edge of the cup along her gums ... the broken edge caused laceration and severe pain. Food into the lung of one unresisting prisoner caused severe choking, vomiting ... persistent coughing.

The government was now on the defensive. The last thing they wanted was suffragettes dying in prison and becoming martyrs for their cause. Hunger strikes became official WSPU policy, especially when it was realised that those who refused food were released from prison when their health deteriorated. A further 37 prisoners who followed Dunlop's example were released. But then the government introduced force-feeding for women who consistently refused to eat.

The pictorial propaganda of the suffragettes portrayed force-feeding as oral rape, as the image in Source F (page 124) shows, and doctors protested to the prime minister about the 'unwise and inhumane practice'.

#### The 'Cat and Mouse Act'

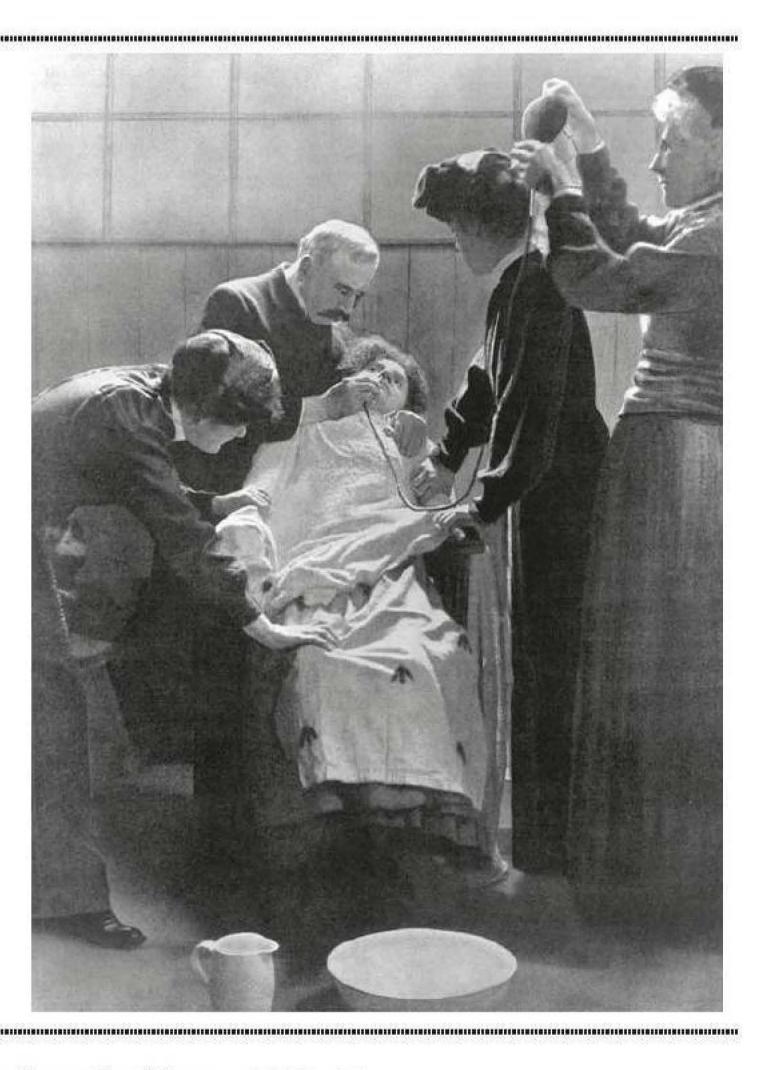
In April 1913, as a result of adverse publicity, the Prisoners' Temporary Discharge for Ill-Health Act was passed. This gave the prison authorities the power to release persistent hunger strikers from prison, give them time to recover and then rearrest them. This new piece of legislation may have been an ingenious device by the government to put an end to hunger striking but it was soon dubbed the 'Cat and Mouse Act' and, again, it handed the suffragettes a propaganda gift.

To what extent does Source E support the evidence shown in Source F (page 124)?

6

#### SOURCE F

How useful is the poster in Source F to a historian studying the government's response to suffragette activities?



A poster, published in 1910 by the WSPU, showing a suffragette being force-fed.

# The decline of militancy 1912–14



# Emily Wilding Davison (1872–1913)

Gave up teaching to campaign for the vote in 1906. Imprisoned several times. Died from injuries sustained at the Epsom Derby. Accounts and cartoons of force-feeding provided compelling propaganda and elicited considerable sympathy and support for the suffragettes. By 1913, the WSPU was propagating the idea that Emmeline Pankhurst was nearing death in her prison cell (she had been given an eight-month prison sentence in March 1912). Then, in June 1913, came news of a suffragette dying for her cause.

**Emily Wilding Davison** had been the first to set fire to a pillar box and had been subsequently imprisoned. At the famous Epsom Derby horse race in 1913, she jumped out in front of the king's horse and later died of her injuries. If is not known whether she intended to kill herself – she had bought a return ticket – but Emmeline Pankhurst decided to make her a martyr to the cause.

Davison's funeral became a huge suffragette demonstration. It was undeniably very moving and it was reported that the crowds in Hyde Park in London took off their hats as a mark of respect at the mention of her name. However, some showed more concern for the horse, which did recover. While some of the press acknowledged her bravery, others argued that society could not afford to give in to what was a form of terrorism.

The years 1912–14 constituted the final phase of the suffragette campaign, with window breaking, attacks on pillar boxes and arson. From her exile in Paris, Christabel Pankhurst advocated these actions partly because it enabled the suffragettes to make a quick getaway and avoid the increasingly rough treatment at the hands of the police. The militants always claimed that the targets of their attacks were property and not one person was killed as a result of burning buildings. However, some of the window breaking, of London's west end shops, for example, was now fairly indiscriminate and endangered the safety of members of the public rather than government personnel and property.

Some members of the WSPU began to wonder whether Christabel's support of escalating violence was wrecking the movement by alienating public opinion. Elizabeth Wolstenholme-Elmy, a long-time supporter of women's rights and a member of the WSPU, certainly thought so.

# SOURCE G

# From a letter sent by Elizabeth Wolstenholme-Elmy to the *Manchester Guardian* in July 1912.

Now that our cause is on the verge of success, I wish to add my protest against the madness which seems to have seized a few persons whose anti-social and criminal actions would seem designed to wreck the whole movement ... I appeal to our friends in the ministry and in Parliament not to be deterred from setting right a great wrong by the folly or criminality of a few persons.

Frederick Pethwick-Lawrence, a lawyer who had defended many suffragettes in court and who, with his wife, Emmeline, had financed much WSPU activity, judged that the WSPU had largely got the public on their side in 1912 but that the advantage was being thrown away by the violence of the extreme militants. Christabel Pankhurst, defiant in the face of criticism of her leadership and increasingly critical of men's involvement in the movement, expelled both Pethwick-Lawrences from the WSPU. Two years later, in 1914, Sylvia Pankhurst, although loyal to WSPU militancy, was expelled by her mother and sister for taking too independent a line in her support for specifically working-class issues.

The government, meanwhile, stood firm, believing that public opinion was beginning to turn against the suffragettes. From mid-1912 onwards, many WSPU meetings were met by hostile crowds throwing eggs, fruit and bags of flour at them. In effect, the suffragettes were being driven off the streets of London. With more and more of them imprisoned (and then recaptured under

Who does the author of Source G accuse of 'folly and criminality' and on what grounds?



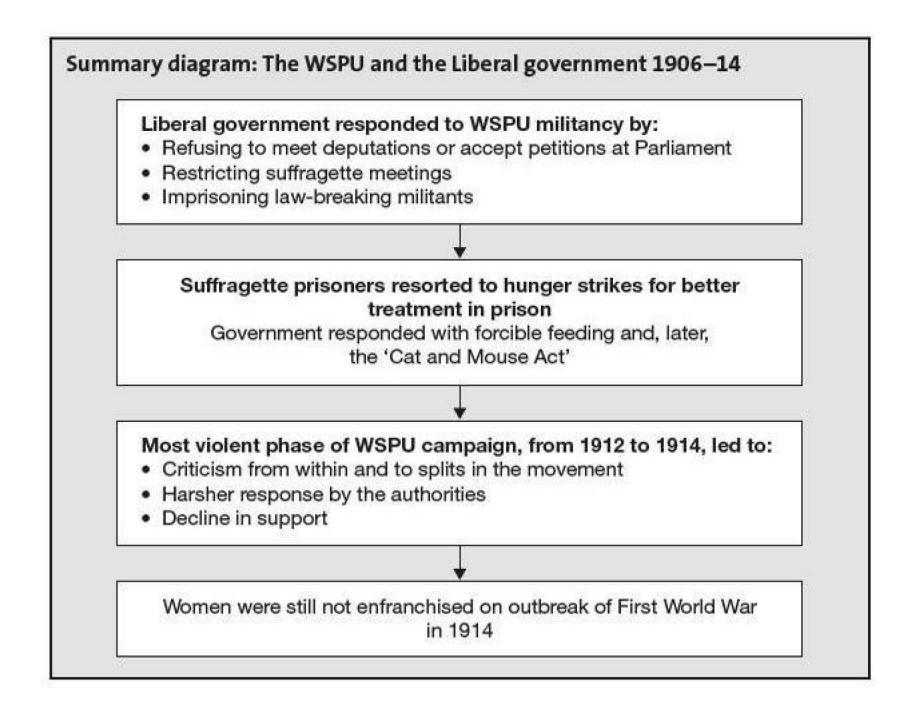
## Frederick and Emmeline Pethwick-Lawrence (1871–1961 and 1867–1954)

Emmeline was treasurer of the WSPU and Frederick donated much of his fortune to the organisation. Both were arrested, along with Emmeline Pankhurst, on conspiracy charges in March 1912 and sentenced to eight months in prison. Both went on hunger strike and were forcibly fed. They were expelled from the WSPU in October 1912.

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the 'Cat and Mouse Act') and the government making moves to close down The Suffragette, the WSPU was losing the support of some of its members and the effectiveness of the WSPU was threatened. It could be argued that the Pankhursts had become trapped in a spiral of decline.

When, finally, Asquith agreed to meet a deputation of women campaigners, it was a group from the NUWSS, in 1913, and then, in June 1914, a working-class delegation from Sylvia Pankhurst's east London organisation, not a WSPU delegation, that he met. He stated that he had come round to the idea of votes for women on the same terms as men. Within a few weeks, Britain was at war and the WSPU and most of the other suffrage societies suspended their campaigning. As historian Martin Pugh has pointed out, the sex war was swamped by the Great War.





# Key debate

Was the militancy of the WSPU the main reason why women were not enfranchised by 1914?

Historians disagree over whether WSPU militancy helped or hindered the cause of women's suffrage. As we have seen above, the first suffrage campaigners that the prime minister agreed to meet were from the non-militant NUWSS, not the WSPU. However, as the historian Martin Pugh has written, 'by drawing criticism upon themselves, the suffragettes helped the constitutional suffragists to be better appreciated by the press and the politicians'.

# The militancy of the WSPU

Although the emergence of the WSPU initially gave a very favourable boost to the women's campaign, it can be argued that the militancy espoused by the WSPU leadership ultimately had a negative impact and, especially in the years 1912-14, made the passage of reform less, rather than more, likely.

Much of the early heckling targeted politicians like Winston Churchill and David Lloyd George (see page 118) who were sympathetic to, if not supportive of, women's suffrage. Later on, when arson was adopted, Lloyd George's country house was burned down. Emmeline Pankhurst explained, 'We have tried blowing him up to wake his conscience.' The building was empty when it was targeted but, nevertheless, the WSPU leader's comment, while it might embolden the militant minority of WSPU members, did not win any more support among the public or in the government. In fact, it had the opposite effect.

Not only did public and politicians become resentful of extreme forms of militancy. So too did too did loyal, long-standing WSPU members: Emmeline and Frederick Pethwick-Lawrence believed that the leadership were sacrificing the goodwill and sympathy which the treatment meted out to suffragette prisoners had elicited. The Pankhursts and their allies appeared to be increasingly fanatical and dismissive of the opinions of both the public and some of their most loyal colleagues. Annie Kenney, ever devoted to Christabel Pankhurst, asked: 'what do we care whether we have public opinion with us or not?' The militants' tactics played into the hands of the politicians rather than increasing pressure on them.

The decline in public support and an increasingly hostile press enabled the government to implement the 'Cat and Mouse Act', to recapture prisoners and thus withdraw suffragettes from the militant campaign on the streets.

#### **EXTRACT I**

# From Martin Pugh, *The March of the Women*, Oxford University Press, 2000, p. 210.

The government persisted with its highly illiberal methods in the confidence that opinions had turned against the WSPU's campaign ... In the process the organization was driven steadily underground and lost contact both with the public and much of its membership: by 1913 subscriptions had begun to fall and some members withdrew into other suffrage societies.

By 1914, the WSPU leadership was trapped in a confrontation with the government which, to some extent, turned the women's issue into a debate about law and order. In these circumstances, the government was unlikely to concede votes for women.

#### Other factors

The emergence of the WSPU and, specifically, of its militant tactics from 1905 onwards had an energising impact on the whole campaign for women's suffrage. The heckling of political leaders like Lloyd George and Churchill attracted huge publicity which, in turn, boosted membership (and funds) of the WSPU. By 1907, there were 58 branches. This and other tactics, such as intervening in by-elections, made votes for women into one of the most prominent political issues of the day. Indirectly, the militancy of the WSPU also benefited the moderate suffragists of the NUWSS. Although most of the latter did not approve of WSPU tactics, some, like Lady Knightley, acknowledged that the militants were helping the cause by their 'pluck and determination'. The militants' example and the higher profile which the women's campaign achieved thus emboldened the moderates, in both the WSPU and the NUWSS. The latter became more assertive and organised bigger demonstrations.

#### **EXTRACT 2**

#### From Paula Bartley, Votes for Women, Hodder Education, 2007, p. 94.

Historians generally acknowledge that the early militancy of the suffragettes increased interest in women's suffrage as never before. Between 1907 and 1914 over 50 new women's suffrage societies were founded. And even Millicent Fawcett [President of the NUWSS] credited suffragette militancy with a rise in the membership of the NUWSS. Indeed, between 1897 and 1903, when the WSPU was formed, the NUWSS had only 16 branches, but by 1909 this had increased to 207, allegedly helped by the publicity generated by the WSPU.

How far do the historians quoted in Extracts 1 and 2 agree or differ in their interpretations of the failure of the WSPU to gain the vote for women by 1914?

The years of militancy saw a significant increase in donations and subscriptions for the WSPU which, in turn, enabled the organisation to employ more staff, organise more processions and sell more merchandise (such as banners, badges and dolls, all in suffragette colours). Even at the height of the militants' campaign, far greater numbers of WSPU activists were engaged in peaceful campaigning. And their meetings and demonstrations consistently attracted bigger audiences than those of the more moderate suffragists.

When the WSPU embarked on illegal activities like window-breaking and, even, arson, they were careful to target property, not people, so as not to alienate public opinion. Furthermore, they suspended their campaign of violent action during negotiations over the Conciliation Bills. They upheld a truce for all except a week of the period from January 1910 to November 1911. It was the obduracy of the government and, in particular, the stance taken by Prime Minister Asquith in obstructing the passage of these bills, which led the suffragettes to the conclusion that force, not persuasion, was necessary.

## The opposition of the Liberal leaders

The evidence suggests that many, if not the majority, of MPs, especially in the Liberal Party, had been won over by the arguments in favour of women's suffrage by the start of the twentieth century. So why was the Liberal leadership so obstructive? Certainly Asquith himself was unsympathetic. Also, many politicians were apprehensive about the impact on electoral politics of enfranchising several million women. Party political calculation was certainly at the root of Liberal concerns: most of the bills for women's suffrage would have extended the vote on the same basis as men; that is, to every householder. Many Liberals feared that, in giving the vote to propertied women (in effect, 'Votes for Ladies'), they would be enfranchising more potential Conservative voters. Both Lloyd George and Churchill opposed the first Conciliation Bill of 1910 on these grounds.

The militancy of the WSPU was intended to *force* the government to give its backing yet, paradoxically, it never used enough force to endanger the survival of the Liberal government. By contrast, the threats of industrial action, especially from striking coal miners, and of the use of force from **Ulster Unionists** in Ireland presented the government with more urgent, pressing problems. If the government was seen to give in to the militancy of the WSPU, they would be setting a dangerous precedent. The issues of labour unrest and Ireland, like that of votes for women, were still unresolved when the First World War broke out.



Olster Unionists Members of an organisation that wanted the province of Ulster, in Ireland, to remain British. They threatened to rebel when the Liberal government planned to give selfgovernment to Ireland.

# Chapter summary

The WSPU was formed in response to the lack of progress made towards the enfranchisement of women. Led by Emmeline Pankhurst and her daughters, Christabel and Sylvia, it was run on authoritarian lines and, from 1905, adopted increasingly confrontational methods such as heckling political leaders. As the organisation adopted more militant tactics, the Liberal government, elected in 1906, restricted more democratic forms of protest by refusing to accept WSPU petitions or meet deputations at Parliament.

Prison sentences were given for law-breaking activities such as window smashing and arson. When suffragettes were denied rights as political prisoners, some went on hunger strikes. That, in turn, led to forcible feeding and, when public opinion was alienated, Parliament passed the 'Cat and Mouse Act', which authorised the prisons to release weak inmates and then rearrest them when they had recovered.

The most violent period of suffragette militancy, from 1912 to 1914, led to a harsher response by the government, splits within the WSPU and declining public sympathy. Women were still not enfranchised at the outbreak of the First World War in 1914.



# Refresher questions

Use these questions to remind yourself of the key material covered in this chapter.

- What were the methods used by the NUWSS?
- 2 How was the WSPU led and organised?
- 3 How successful was the WSPU in its early years?
- 4 Why did the WSPU adopt more militant tactics after 1905?
- 5 What was the Conciliation Committee?
- 6 How did the Liberal government respond to the suffragettes' more militant actions?

- 7 Why, and with what results, did the government resort to the forcible feeding of suffragette prisoners?
- 8 What were the effects of the 'Cat and Mouse Act'?
- 9 Why did the WSPU become less effective after 1912?
- 10 Why was the Liberal leadership opposed to votes for women?



# Question practice

#### **ESSAY QUESTIONS**

- 1 How far do you agree that the opposition of Asquith and the Liberal government, from 1906 to 1914, was the main reason why women were still not enfranchised by 1914?
- 2 'Far from harming the cause of "Votes for Women", the WSPU had, by 1914, made it into one of the most important political issues of the day.' How far do you agree with this statement?
- 3 'The violence espoused by the WSPU, from 1905 onwards, was the main reason for their failure to achieve the female suffrage by 1914.' How far do you agree with this statement?
- 4 'A successful campaign requires effective leadership.' To what extent does this explain the success of the campaign for the repeal of the Contagious Diseases Acts in 1886 and the failure of the Women's Social and Political Union to obtain votes for women by 1914?

#### SOURCE ANALYSIS QUESTION

1 Assess the value of Source 1 for revealing the methods of the WSPU suffragettes and why they were not successful by 1914. Explain your answer using the source, the information given about its origin and your own knowledge about the historical context.

#### SOURCE I

From William Stead, writing in *The Review of Reviews*, June 1910. Stead was an English newspaper editor and a pioneer of investigative journalism. He was influential in demonstrating how the press could be used to influence public opinion and government policy. He had founded *The Review of Reviews* in 1890.

Saturday, June 18th, promises to be a memorable day in the history of Woman's Suffrage. Since the General Election the militants have postponed the threatened resumption of warlike tactics in order to give a fair opportunity to the tactics of ordinary peaceful, law-abiding demonstration. They are as keen as ever for admission within the pale of the Constitution, but they have been told that after 480 of their number have proved the sincerity of their enthusiasm by going to gaol there is no need now for anything more sensational than a great procession through the streets of London and a united demonstration in Albert Hall. Although the older, not to say the ancient, Union [NUWSS] which bore the burden and heat of the day before the advent of the Suffragettes is not to be officially represented in the procession – much to our regret - most of their members will probably be in the ranks. This is emphatically an occasion on which all advocates for woman's emancipation should sink their differences and present a united front to the enemy. I sincerely hope that all my Helpers and Associates who may be in town will not fail to fall into line and spare no effort to make the procession of June 18th one of those memorable demonstrations of political earnestness which leave an indelible impression on the public mind. That the Women will obtain enfranchisement in this Parliament I do not venture to hope. But the days of the present Parliament are numbered, and the prospects of success in the next will largely depend on the impression of orderly, well-disciplined enthusiasm which London will receive from this midsummer procession.

# Trade union militancy 1917–27

Trade union militancy became an increasingly common feature of industrial relations during and, more particularly, after the First World War. It reached its peak in the General Strike of 1926. Its development is examined through the following themes:

- ★ Trade unions and government 1914–22
- ★ The origins of the General Strike
- ★ The 1926 General Strike and its aftermath

# **Key dates**

1915		Glasgow rent strike	1925		Government announced subsidy to
1919	Jan.	Forty Hours strike in Glasgow			mine industry on 'Red Friday'
	Sept.	National rail strike	1926	March	Report of Samuel Commission
1920	Aug.	Council of Action		May I	Miners locked out
Oc	Oct.	Miners' strike led to Emergency Powers Act		May 4	Start of General Strike
1921		Collapse of Triple Alliance on 'Black		May 12	TUC called off General Strike
		Friday'	1927		Trades Disputes Act



# Trade unions and government 1914–22

What form did trade union militancy take during and after the War?

During the First World War there was a huge growth in the trade union movement. Membership rose from 4 million to 6 million. This made the unions more confident in their dealings with employers. The unions also became stronger because the government depended on the workers in such vital industries as steel, engineering, shipbuilding and munitions to produce weapons and other war materials. The government also needed the cooperation of the railway workers in order to move the goods and soldiers needed for the war effort. This put the unions in a stronger position in which to bargain for higher

wages and better conditions. With a growing demand for arms and munitions needed for the war effort, the employers often agreed to higher wages.

Trade union members, represented by the **Trades Union Congress (TUC)**, were generally supportive of the war effort and worked cooperatively with the government. Nevertheless, there were a few outbreaks of trade union **militancy** which the union leaders were unable to control. For instance, the engineering workers in the shipbuilding industry on the River Clyde, in Glasgow, defied their union leaders and went on strike for higher wages in February 1915. The supply of munitions was disrupted and they were denounced in the press as unpatriotic but they won most of what they wanted. However, strike action in such a vital war industry now led to direct government intervention. Trade union leaders were persuaded to agree to **compulsory arbitration** in pay disputes in all industries regarded as essential for war.

# The Glasgow rent strike 1915

It was not only trade union militancy which posed a threat to social stability and the war effort. In Glasgow there was a wave of rent strikes in 1915. The background to this was the increasing pressure on housing as more workers were drawn in to work in the shipyards. Housing in the poorest areas was already overcrowded and often damp and dilapidated. Now conditions worsened and some landlords exploited the increased demand for housing by raising the rents they charged.

From April 1915, a movement emerged, mostly organised by women but backed up by their husbands working in the nearby shipyards, in which tenants refused to pay increases in rent. When landlords sent their agents to carry out evictions, they were met by organised opposition, large numbers of people who prevented them evicting tenants. When the tenants were faced with court action, a full-scale rent strike was organised in May 1915: 25,000 tenants joined the movement by the end of the year. The organisation was highly effective and accused landlords of being anti-patriotic. The strikers were supported by the employers on the Clyde, who did not want to see production affected. The government was so worried that the strike might spread and damage support for the war effort that they passed legislation in December 1915 to freeze rents at pre-war levels.

# Wartime cooperation

The Labour Party leader, Arthur Henderson, who was also leader of the Ironfounders' Union, was made a Cabinet minister in the Liberal-led coalition government in 1915. A year later, in 1916, when Lloyd George became prime minister, he invited two more trade union leaders to become Cabinet ministers in an attempt to bind the labour movement to the government. The government took control of the coalmines, as it had done with the railways in 1914, in order to consolidate its control over the war effort. This pleased the miners' union, the Miners' Federation of Great Britain (MFGB), because their relations with the



Trades Union Congress (TUC) The body created in 1868 to represent the unions collectively.

**Militancy** The active championing of a cause or belief, sometimes with the use of force.

Compulsory arbitration Enforced settlement of a dispute by a judge.

#### **SOURCE A**



A protest demonstration during the Glasgow rent strike of 1915.

What does the photograph in Source A reveal about the nature of the Glasgow rent strike?

private mine owners, who were suspected of making huge profits in the war, remained very bitter.

For most of the war, the trade unions cooperated willingly with the government and secured better deals for their members than they might have elicited from their employers without the government's intervention. However, as the end of the war approached, the TUC raised the workers' fears of heavy unemployment once the 4 million men in arms returned and hundreds of thousands were laid off in the munitions industry. One way forward was to negotiate for a reduced number of working hours so that more could be kept in work. The big unions were also keen to establish national, not regional, rates of pay. The miners, in particular, campaigned for this in order to prevent mine owners in different parts of the country imposing different rates of pay. They were keen to get the government to legislate for this in case the coalmines were returned to the control of the private mine owners after the war.

Despite the benefits of wartime cooperation with the government, some trade union members lost faith in their leaders. They felt that their leaders were too close to government, less in touch with their members and working conditions on the factory floor. This partly explains why there were a number of 'unofficial' strikes, such as that on Clydeside in 1915, which union leaders did not support. Some of this distrust was diluted when the Labour Party, many of whose members were trade unionists, voted for Labour ministers to withdraw from the wartime coalition government at the end of the war.

One of those who proposed this move was James Maxton, who had been prominent in organising strikes among shipyard workers on Clydeside during the war. Maxton was a member of the Independent Labour Party (ILP), the most socialist part of the labour movement. He was a vocal opponent of the war. In 1916, he was even convicted of sedition and imprisoned for a year. Towards the end of the war, in 1918, he and other members of the ILP were instrumental in persuading the Labour Party to adopt genuinely socialist ideas, like nationalisation, in their new constitution.

# Post-war militancy

After the war the trade unions continued to recruit new members and, by 1920, had a total membership of 8 million. They were buoyed up by the fact that, in the immediate post-war period, there was little unemployment despite the demobilisation of troops. The unions were in a strong bargaining position and there was a rash of strikes in 1919. On the railways, which were still under direct state control at the end of the war, the government reduced wages, at a time of rising prices, and, in September 1919, the National Union of Railwaymen (NUR) called a national strike. This caused massive disruption: the railways were by far the most important means of transport for both goods and people. In the event, the strike only lasted for seven days thanks to the leader of the Transport Workers' Union, Ernest Bevin, whose intervention led to a settlement in which it was agreed that existing wages would be maintained for another year.

# Forty Hours strike 1919

In Glasgow, in January 1919, engineering workers went on strike to demand a 40-hour week. As war contracts were completed and soldiers returned from the front, the workers feared unemployment and wanted to share the available work out more widely. They called for a general strike in which workers in other industries would join them in sympathy and show solidarity in their battle with their bosses. Few unions gave their backing but the government feared widespread unrest, perhaps a mass movement, and scented revolution inspired by the Russian Revolution. They sent troops into 'Red Clydeside'.

Soon there were over 50,000 men on strike. Manny Shinwell, the local leader of the British Seafarers' Union, threatened to shut off Glasgow's power stations



#### **KEY FIGURES**

## James Maxton (1885 - 1946)

A Scottish socialist and member of the ILP. He became a Labour MP in 1922. He was a brilliant orator and Churchill described him as 'the greatest parliamentarian of his day'.

#### Ernest Bevin (1881-1951)

Founder and secretary of the Transport and General Workers' Union (TGWU) in 1922. During the General Strike, Bevin was in charge of co-ordinating the activities of the unions (see page 142).

## Manny Shinwell (1884 - 1986)

A member of the Independent Labour Party, he was elected to Parliament in 1922. He remained an MP until 1970 (when, aged 86, he was the oldest member of the House of Commons).



#### **KEY TERMS**

Nationalisation Taking into public ownership (government control).

General strike Several unions coming out on strike together.

'Red Clydeside' Red is the colour associated with radical, left-wing politics, which characterised Glasgow, particularly the areas on the River Clyde, at this time.

and close down the trams. Using strikers and recently demobilised soldiers, he said he would 'stop every tramcar, shut off every light, and generally paralyse the business of the city'. On 31 January, a mass meeting was held in George Square in the city to hear the response to the strikers' request for government intervention in the dispute. A sudden police charge led to a riot. Shinwell was one of those who tried to calm the situation but running battles continued for the rest of the day. The strike fizzled out and its leaders were arrested. Shinwell was sentenced to five months' imprisonment for incitement to riot.

The government remained fearful of a revolutionary uprising and after the riot, the home secretary, Winston Churchill, sent 10,000 troops to Glasgow to deter any further gatherings. The reputation of Red Clydeside as a centre of political and industrial militancy grew in the years ahead and, in the 1922 general election, several Red Clydesiders, including Maxton and Shinwell, were elected to Parliament as Labour MPs.

#### The Council of Action 1920

There were few instances of strike action being taken for overtly political purposes. However, one of them occurred in 1919 when London dockers refused to load a ship with munitions which were to be used against **revolutionary Russia**. The dockers were supported in this action by their leader, Ernest Bevin. Then, in August 1920, when Britain threatened to become involved in a war against Russia, Bevin took the lead in pressing for the formation of a Council of Action to prevent British involvement. The Council pledged, with the support of the TUC and the Labour Party, to mobilise mass strikes should the threat prove real. Further action proved unnecessary as the British government did not intervene.

## The amalgamation of unions

In the early 1920s, the unions were forced on to the defensive: after years of gaining members, they began to lose them as economic depression set in and unemployment rose. With demand for labour falling, the unions were in a weaker bargaining position with their employers. In order to strengthen the unions, particularly in their resistance to wage cuts, steps were taken to incorporate all the workers in particular industries, and all the different unions that represented them, into big, consolidated unions. So, for instance, in 1921, the Associated Engineering Union (AEU) was formed out of several, smaller engineering unions and, in 1922, the Transport and General Workers' Union (TGWU) was created. Under the leadership of Ernest Bevin, the TGWU continued to absorb smaller unions and was to become the largest union in the country.



### Revolutionary Russia

In October 1917, Russian
Communist revolutionaries
had taken power under
Lenin and then called on
workers everywhere to do
the same and overthrow their
governments.

#### Summary diagram: Trade unions and government 1914-22

#### Trade unions during the First World War

- Grew in membership
- · Mostly benefited from cooperation with government

#### Militancy was a feature of war-time and post-war Britain:

- · Glasgow rent strike 1915
- · Strike by railwaymen 1919
- Forty Hours strike by engineering workers 1919
- Council of Action 1920



## The origins of the General Strike

How did problems in the coal industry lead to the General Strike of 1926?

Many trade union members had done well in the war and its immediate aftermath. Their wartime experience of cooperation with their employers and the government had, mostly, been a good one. Most trade unionists disliked the new militancy, preferring to resolve disputes through negotiation.

However, the coal miners had experienced a tense and bitter relationship with their employers before the war and they did not wish to see control of the mines returned to private enterprise after its end. In 1919, the miners threatened a strike demanding higher pay, shorter hours of work and the nationalisation of the mines. The prime minister, Lloyd George, prevented an immediate strike by agreeing to set up a Commission, headed by a judge, Sir John Sankey, to make recommendations on the future of the industry. Lloyd George said he would accept the majority decision. Miners and their representatives on the Commission recommended continued nationalisation; the coalmine owners and employers opposed nationalisation. The chairman tipped the balance by recommending nationalisation. However, Lloyd George, under pressure from Conservative members of his coalition government, rejected nationalisation. This 'betrayal' embittered the miners and led to increasing distrust of the government.

## The problems of the coal industry

The origins of the General Strike of 1926 lay in the problems of the coal industry. There were over a million miners, making up one in ten of the male workforce and, in payment for their hard and often dangerous work, they were paid better



#### **KEY TERM**

#### Staple industries

The industries on which Britain's economic strength had traditionally been based, for example coal, iron, shipbuilding and textiles.

What trends can you see in the output, exports and productivity of the coal industry from 1922 to 1925? than most other workers. Then, in the early 1920s, their wages began to decline and they experienced rising unemployment. There were many reasons for the problems facing the industry.

The biggest problem was the slowing down in demand for coal on the world market. Coal produced by the mines and many of the goods from other staple industries had been exported abroad. Then, in the war, many countries that had depended on imports from Britain had to look elsewhere. After the war, some of those countries no longer needed to import coal (and textiles, iron goods and other manufactures) from Britain. They found other sources, often cheaper. Another reason for declining demand for coal was that many countries, Britain included, were using oil, rather than coal, in their ships. A deeper, longer term problem was that Britain's mines were old and outdated. Many owners had failed to invest in new, more efficient, production techniques. This meant that Britain's miners were less productive, mining less coal per worker than in competitor countries like the USA, Poland and Germany. As a result, Britain could not produce and export coal as cheaply as other countries so that the industry became less competitive in the world market. In order to cut the costs of production and sell coal at lower prices, the owners wanted to reduce miners' wages.

**Table 8.1** Output, exports and productivity in the coal industry 1913–25. (Adapted from G.A. Phillips, *The General Strike*, Weidenfeld & Nicolson, 1976, p. 24)

Year	Output (millions of tons)	Exports (millions of tons)	Output per man per year (tons)
1913	270	98	260
1919	230	-	240
1922	250	87	195
1923	276	102	229
1924	267	82	220
1925	255	69	217

## The Triple Alliance and 'Black Friday' 1921

In 1920, the miners revived the Triple Alliance. This was a loose alliance between the three big unions representing the miners, the railwaymen and the transport workers. It had been planned in 1914 but never took action because of the war. Its aim was to provide mutual support in the event of one of the unions being involved in a strike. So, for example, if the miners went on strike, the railwaymen and other transport workers would not move imported coal around the country. (At this time, most industry and homes relied on coal for power and heating.) In effect, the Triple Alliance made provision for a widespread, or general, strike that would put the unions in a stronger position to achieve their objectives.

In October 1920, the miners went on strike for higher wages. The railwaymen and transport workers decided to follow suit. The government was so alarmed that it rushed through an Emergency Powers Act in Parliament so that it could, if necessary, declare a state of emergency and use troops to preserve law and order and maintain essential supplies. Meanwhile, the government agreed to a six-month wage increase for the miners.

This agreement showed the power of the miners and of the Triple Alliance but it simply postponed a major industrial dispute. The reason for this is that the government was planning to hand back control of the mines, and the railways, to the private owners. The coalmine owners, who were suffering huge financial losses, were determined to reduce wages so that they could produce coal more cheaply and thus be competitive in the export market. The miners refused to accept wage cuts and, on 31 March 1921, when control was handed back to the mine owners, the latter locked out the workers.

The Triple Alliance was now invoked. The railwaymen and transport workers agreed to go on strike. The government intervened to try and resume negotiations but the miners refused. However, J.H. Thomas, the leader of the National Union of Railwaymen, demanded that the miners resume talks, which they again refused to do. Thomas and the leader of the National Transport Workers' Federation, Robert Williams, cancelled their sympathetic strikes. This day of 'betrayal' became known as 'Black Friday'. The miners had to fight alone until, ten weeks later, they agreed to go back to work on reduced wages.

'Black Friday' forced the TUC to change its organisation. It would need a stronger, united front in order to deal with the employers' wage reductions and government strategy. It set up a General Council to deal with inter-union disputes and to co-ordinate industrial action by the unions.

## 'Red Friday' 1925 and the Samuel Commission

In the early 1920s, all the industries that depended on exports continued to suffer. As exports declined, wages were cut and workers were laid off. In June 1925, the coalmine owners decided to cut wages by ten per cent. The miners rejected this move and secured the support of the General Council. The latter requested the railwaymen and other transport workers to agree not to move coal around the country in the event of a miners' strike. Walter Citrine, one of the TUC leaders, said: 'If the industries fought singly they would be broken singly. Only if they could get Trade Unions to rally to the support of the miners now had they any chance of settlement in other industries threatened by attacks.'

With the threat of concerted action organised by the General Council of the TUC, the Conservative government, led by **Stanley Baldwin**, intervened. It announced a temporary subsidy to enable the coalmine owners to maintain wages at existing levels and the establishment of a special commission to examine and make recommendations on the future of the coal industry. Many



#### **KEY FIGURES**

### J.H. Thomas (1874-1950)

Helped to form the National Union of Railwaymen (NUR), of which he was leader from 1917 to 1931. He was leader at the time of the successful strike in 1919 but was reluctant to lead the NUR into the General Strike in 1926. He was a Labour MP from 1910 to 1936.

## Stanley Baldwin (1867–1947)

Leader of the Conservative Party 1923–37; and prime minister 1924–9, 1923–4 and 1935–7. trade unionists saw this as a victory for concerted action and called the day the subsidy was announced, 31 July, 'Red Friday'. However, as one of their leaders said, 'It was only an armistice'. The government was playing for time. In the months ahead they planned the stockpiling of essential resources and established links with haulage companies which could be relied on to transport goods by lorry in the event of the railways being closed down.

In March 1926, the commission, chaired by Sir Herbert Samuel, produced its report. It recommended the following:

- the reorganisation of the coal industry, for example by amalgamating many smaller mines
- the end of the government subsidy
- the maintenance of national wage agreements, which the owners opposed
- no increase in hours of work but immediate wage reductions to make the industry competitive.

## 'Not a penny off the pay! Not a second on the day!'

Most of the mine owners opposed national wage agreements, preferring to make their own district-by-district arrangements. These were seen by the miners as an attempt to divide them and, ultimately, destroy their union. The miners rejected any wage cuts. 'Not a penny off the pay! Not a second on the day!' was their slogan. There was little chance of a settlement.

The TUC supported the miners' position but continued to call for negotiations on the basis of the Samuel Commission's recommendations. Perhaps they scented defeat if there was no settlement. Some, like J.H. Thomas, the railwaymen's leader, were keen to avert a strike. Others were swept along by support for the miners' case. Most based their hopes on government intervention in the dispute. The government, however, was in no mood to pressurise the mine owners or prolong its subsidy.

With the government subsidy due to run out on 1 May, the individual mine owners began to issue notices of new, lower wage rates and to plan for a lock-out of the miners. In late April, at a trade union conference, the General Council was authorised to take on 'the conduct of the dispute' and call a strike if necessary. On 2 May, the printers at the *Daily Mail* refused to set up an editorial for the next day's paper entitled 'For King and Country' (see Source B, opposite).

Some members of the Conservative government, such as Winston Churchill (see page 52), had wanted a showdown with the unions. Now they could cite 'this interference with the freedom of the Press' as a reason to end all talks with the TUC. On 3 May, the government declared a state of emergency and the TUC began its strike the next day.

#### SOURCE B

# From the editorial of the *Daily Mail* which was planned for the 3 May 1926 edition of the newspaper.

We do not wish to say anything hard about the miners themselves. As to their leaders, all we need say at this moment is that some of them are (and have openly declared themselves) under the influence of people who mean no good to this country.

The general strike is not an industrial dispute; it is a revolutionary movement, intended to inflict suffering on the great mass of innocent persons in the community and thereby put forcible constraint upon the government.

For what reasons do you think the printers at the Daily Mail refused to typeset the editorial in Source B?

#### Summary diagram: The origins of the General Strike

#### **General Strike**

- · Arose out of the problems of the coal industry
- · Coal industry was less competitive after First World War
- Government returned the mines to private ownership in 1921
- 'Triple Alliance' opposed pay cuts but collapsed on 'Black Friday'

#### Samuel Commission recommendations in 1926 were rejected

- · Coal owners opposed to reorganisation of the mines
- Miners opposed to pay cuts

The TUC called for a General Strike in support of the miners

# 3

# The 1926 General Strike and its aftermath

- ► How effective was the TUC in maintaining support for the strike?
- ► How effective was the government in dealing with the strike?

## The TUC General Council and the strike

The TUC and the main unions had been reluctant to prepare for a conflict which they did not want and believed they could not win. The General Council had only begun detailed planning of the strike a week before it started yet they were able to call out over 1.5 million workers, on top of the million miners, on 4 May, the first day. These included:

- all transport workers
- printers (of books and newspapers)
- iron and steel workers
- those in the power industries, gas and electricity.

The engineering and shipbuilding workers were called out after a week. It was not a 'General Strike' in the true sense of the term yet it was more 'general' than any previous strike and has always been described as such.

The solidarity shown by the strikers on the first day was highly impressive: very few, certainly less than one per cent of the engine drivers, firemen and guards on the railways went to work. Hardly any buses, trams or underground trains ran in London while the docks and power stations were as quiet as the mines. In the non-industrialised parts of the country, life went on pretty much as normal, but not in the cities and large towns. Although a small minority of workers began to drift back to work, most stayed loyal throughout the strike. Despite some mistrust of their leader, J.H. Thomas, 98 per cent of the railwaymen stayed out on strike until it was called off.

Ernest Bevin and the Strike Organisation Committee co-ordinated the strikers' activities on behalf of the General Council. In particular, they took charge of the distribution of food and the maintenance of health services. Not surprisingly, they had to rely on local 'strike committees' in the cities outside London. Local studies have illustrated huge variety in the effectiveness of local strike committees: according to historian Keith Laybourn, 'they tend, by and large, to agree in presenting the General Strike as a chaotic, even if heroic, attempt to support the miners'. Within the confines of what the government allowed, Bevin and his committee achieved considerable success. However, the strike's effectiveness was undoubtedly limited by the government's emergency measures.

## The government and the strike

The government's main priorities were to preserve law and order and to maintain essential food supplies and other vital services. It largely achieved both despite the strength of trade union, grassroots support.

Using the Emergency Powers Act of 1920 (see page 139), the government had been planning for a General Strike since 'Red Friday', nine months previously. It had moved troops into key areas and recruited hundreds of thousands of mainly middle-class volunteers to act as special constables and to drive buses, lorries and even trains. The docks were vital to government control of food supplies and thousands of volunteers, as well as sailors, were employed to unload ships in ports such as Liverpool, Bristol, Cardiff, Glasgow and London. The government also managed to keep some power stations working so that gas and electricity supplies could be maintained.

#### SOURCE C



An armoured car escorts a food convoy through London during the General Strike, 1926.

The government's transport and maintenance of food distribution became increasingly effective the longer the strike lasted. A decisive, psychological turning point came on the fifth day of the strike: London was running short of flour and bread and so, before dawn on 8 May, a convoy of over 100 lorries, escorted by armoured cars, went to the docks. Food was loaded and taken to a food centre in Hyde Park. To move food and other essential supplies around the country, the government was largely able to rely on road haulage companies, and their regular drivers. The government's success in maintaining food supplies and essential services undoubtedly contributed to the General Council's eventual decision to call off the strike.

## The role of the media

Although the government was undoubtedly successful in the supply and distribution of food and other essential supplies, the struggle to win over public opinion was less decisive in outcome. With the newspapers closed down, the government looked to, and probably received more favourable treatment from, the BBC because the latter, while proclaiming its independence and broadcasting its own neutral news bulletins, was careful to say nothing critical of the government or supportive of the strikers.

How useful is Source C for an understanding of the events of the General Strike?

143

Although there were sporadic outbreaks of violence between police and strikers, the conduct of the strike was, for the most part, remarkably peaceful and non-violent. Nevertheless, the government played on public fears of disorder and chaos, nowhere more so than in the pages of the *British Gazette*. This was the government's own paper and its editor was Winston Churchill, chancellor of the exchequer.

#### SOURCE D

From the British Gazette, 6 May 1926, the third day of the General Strike. The British Gazette, edited by Winston Churchill, was the mouthpiece of the Conservative government during the strike.

#### MESSAGE FROM THE PRIME MINISTER

'Constitutional government is being attacked

Let all good citizens whose livelihood and labour have thus been put in peril bear with fortitude and patience the hardships with which they have so suddenly been confronted.

'Stand behind the government who are doing their part confident that you will cooperate in the measures they have undertaken to preserve the liberties and privileges of the people of these islands.

'The laws of England are the people's birthright.

'The laws are in your keeping.

'You have made Parliament their guardian.

'The General Strike is a challenge to Parliament and is the road to anarchy and ruin.

#### 'STANLEY BALDWIN'

The strike is intended as a direct hold-up of the nation to ransom ... 'This moment,' as the Prime Minister pointed out in the House of Commons, 'has been chosen to challenge the existing Constitution of the country and to substitute the reign of force for that which now exists ... I do not believe there has been anything like a thorough-going consultation with the rank and file before this despotic power was put in the hands of a small executive in London ... I do not think all the leaders who assented to order a general strike fully realised that they were threatening the basis of ordered government and coming nearer to proclaiming civil war than we have been for centuries past.

The British Worker, published on behalf of the TUC General Council, was first produced on 5 May. It responded to the charges made by the British Gazette.

Plow effective is Source D as a piece of propaganda?

#### **SOURCE E**

#### From the British Worker, 7 May 1926.

The General Council does not challenge the Constitution. It is not seeking to substitute unconstitutional government. Nor is it desirous of undermining our Parliamentary institutions. The sole aim of the Council is to secure for the miners a decent standard of life. The Council is engaged in an industrial dispute. There is no constitutional crisis ...

Every instruction issued by the General Council is evidence of their determination to maintain the struggle strictly on the basis of an industrial dispute. They have ordered every member taking part to be exemplary in his conduct and not give any cause for police interference ... They are not attacking the Constitution. They are not fighting the community. They are defending the mine workers against the mine-owners.

Much of the reporting in the *British Gazette* was highly inflammatory. On 8 May, it reported that the transport and railway unions were going 'to do their utmost to paralyse and break down the supply of food and the necessaries of life' and 'that an organised attempt is being made to starve the people and to wreck the state ...'. Again, the *British Worker* refuted the charges and, in fact, there was evidence of the trade unions helping to unload food ships at some ports.

## The end of the General Strike

The General Council denied that the strike was, in any way, 'a direct challenge to ordered government', insisting that it was an 'industrial dispute, where the workers say we want justice'. Similarly, in the House of Commons, J.H. Thomas, who was a Labour MP as well as the NUR leader, emphasised that the strike 'is merely a plain, economic, industrial dispute, where the workers say we want justice.' However, charges that it was unconstitutional, and thus illegal, were repeated, both in the *British Gazette* and via the BBC, and the TUC found itself in a dilemma. On the one hand, the General Council realised that it could not make the strike fully effective without inconveniencing the public and losing its support. On the other hand, it realised that it was directly challenging the government in that its objective was to force it to intervene in order to prevent further wage reductions in the coal industry. There was, however, no sign at all that the government would give in. This was why the General Council seized the opportunity presented by the intervention of Sir Herbert Samuel.

Samuel contacted J.H. Thomas, the railwaymen's leader, and others on 6 May. Thomas had already said in the House of Commons that the strike had to be called off before 'it got out of hand.' On 7 May, Samuel met the Negotiating Committee of the General Council. He also met representatives of the mine owners. Samuel came up with a list of points, the 'Samuel Memorandum', which was broadly based on his report of March 1926 (see page 139). The TUC told the miners that it was 'a fair basis for negotiating a settlement' but neither the

How effectively does
Source E refute the claim
made in Source D that
the strike is 'a challenge to
Parliament' and a
'challenge to the existing
Constitution'?

miners nor the government were willing to accept it. The government insisted that the strike be called off before they would enter into any negotiations with the TUC. The latter agreed, without receiving any commitment from Stanley Baldwin, the prime minister, to accept the Samuel Memorandum. The TUC instructed the trade unions to end the strike and resume work so that negotiations could continue. It was 12 May, the ninth day of the strike.

The TUC had been reluctant to embark on the strike in the first place and they came to realise that they could never be successful. The government succeeded in maintaining essential supplies and would not back down. To most members of the General Council, the Samuel Memorandum was the only way in which an orderly retreat from the strike could be made.

### The return to work

The end of the strike and the order to return to work brought confusion, especially as it was presented as a success in the *British Worker*, which reported: 'Miners Ensured a Square Deal'. In effect, however, this was a cover-up: the TUC had surrendered. The strikers soon realised they had not achieved the victory they had expected.

Baldwin called on the nation to 'work in a spirit of cooperation and put behind us all malice and vindictiveness' but there was widespread victimisation of those who had been on strike. Some employers tried to root out union officials or would only take on non-union labour. However, there were huge regional variations and, in some areas, the threat to continue the strike was enough to make employers reinstate all their workers. The historian Tony Mason wrote of the northeast that there was 'some victimisation – probably less than might have been expected'. This was the case in most of Britain. Most employers were happy to return to normal working conditions.

However, for the miners, this was not the case. They stayed on strike as they had done in 1921. Both miners and owners remained intransigent. Neither side was willing to negotiate on the basis of the Samuel Memorandum and government attempts at mediation all failed. Then, faced with starvation, some miners started to drift back to work in late summer and, at the end of September, after nearly seven months on strike, the Miners' Federation ordered their regional leaders to make the best deals they could with the owners. In many areas, longer hours and lower wages were imposed.

The collapse of the General Strike and the defeat of the miners constituted a huge blow to the reputation, effectiveness and membership of the trade union movement. It led to recriminations between the miners and the General Council. The former blamed the latter for letting them down. The Council blamed the miners for unwillingness to compromise when defeat was staring them in the face. Nevertheless, the trade union movement survived and the unions continued to challenge the employers on behalf of their members.

## The consequences of the General Strike

In the aftermath of the General Strike, in 1927, the government introduced a Trade Disputes Act aimed at making another general strike impossible. It:

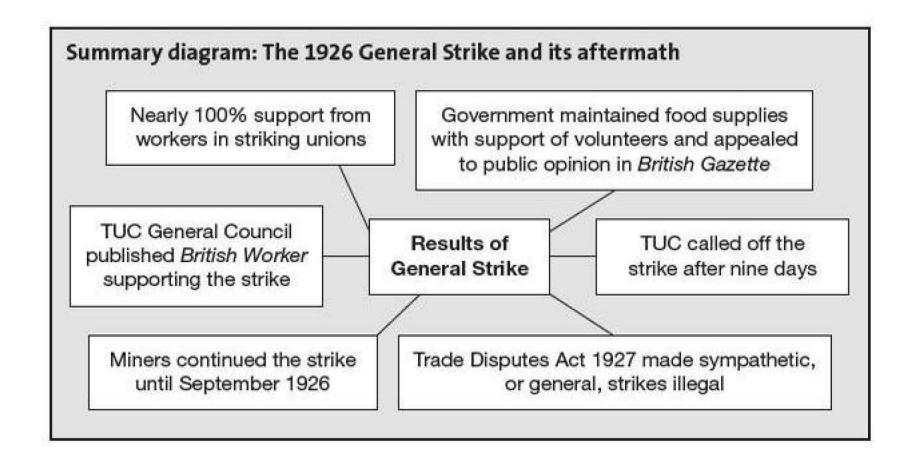
- made general and sympathetic strikes illegal
- restricted strike action to specific disputes
- banned the use of trade union funds for political purposes (for example, support of the Labour Party) unless individual members chose to contribute by 'contracting in'.

Not surprisingly, the Act was seen by the trade unions and the Labour Party as highly punitive.

Some historians have seen the General Strike as a watershed in the development of trade unionism in Britain. They point to the decline in union membership and in militancy, as shown in the number of strikes. Others, however, like Gordon Phillips, believe that trade unionism was not hugely damaged and that it continued to develop along the same lines as it had done before 1926.

Membership did decline after 1926 but it had been doing so before the strike and the fall in numbers after 1926 was not as steep as it had been in the early 1920s. The unions did not abandon the strike weapon but they did use it more cautiously. Fewer days were lost to strike action after 1926 than before but the number had been declining for most of the period from 1921 to 1926, which suggests the reinforcement of an existing trend towards industrial peace.

The events of 1926 showed that industrial action on a national scale was likely to entail political conflict which most trade union leaders did not wish to embark on. They preferred (and most had always preferred) a more pragmatic, less confrontational approach to industrial relations. And this approach was reciprocated by most employers who were glad to return to good relations with their workforce, particularly after the end of the coal strike, which had caused severe power shortages and a significant rise in unemployment in those industries which depended on coal-fired power stations. As historian G.A. Phillips writes: 'the leaders and members of these institutions [trade unions] shared ... the values of their fellow-citizens: the belief in constitutional modes of government, in the virtues of legality, in a pragmatic and conciliatory approach to potentially disruptive social issues'.



# Chapter summary

Many trade unions worked in cooperation with the government during the First World War. However, there were instances of militancy during and after the war: in 1919, there was a national strike on the railways and a strike for a 40-hour week by engineering workers in Glasgow.

The General Strike of 1926 arose out of problems in the coal industry where relations between the miners and the government and between miners and coalmine owners became increasingly bitter. There were strikes in 1920 and 1921. Then, in 

In 1926, the Samuel Commission recommended reorganisation of the industry, which the owners opposed, and wage reductions, which the miners rejected.

With the owners imposing pay cuts and longer hours of work, the miners went on strike again in 1926. They were supported by several other big unions which went on strike in support. This General Strike, during which the government maintained the food supplies with the help of volunteer labour, lasted for nine days. The miners continued on strike for five months but were forced back to work, mostly on lower pay. In 1927, an Act of Parliament made such general strikes illegal. of Parliament made such general strikes illegal.



## Refresher questions

Use these questions to remind yourself of the key material covered in this chapter.

- I What was the cause and result of the Glasgow rent strike of 1915?
- 2 What was James Maxon's importance in the development of the Labour Party?
- 3 What role did Manny Shinwell play in the Forty Hours strike in Glasgow in 1919?
- 4 What were the main problems of the coal industry before the General Strike?
- 5 How successful was the Triple Alliance in 1920?
- 6 Why did many trade unionists see 'Red Friday' in 1925 as a victory?

- 7 What were the main recommendations of the Samuel Commission in 1926?
- 8 How successful were Bevin and the Strike Organisation Committee?
- **9** Why might J.H. Thomas have been criticised by trade union militants in both 1921 and 1926?
- 10 Why did the General Strike never become an effective challenge to the government?
- II What role did the media play during the General Strike?
- 12 Why did the TUC call an end to the General Strike after twelve days?
- 13 What were the main consequences of the General Strike?



## Question practice

#### **ESSAY QUESTIONS**

- 1 To what extent was the coal miners' union responsible for the General Strike in 1926?
- 2 'The report of the Samuel Commission was the most significant development in the events from 1920 to 1926 that led to the outbreak of the General Strike.' How far do you agree with this statement?
- 3 'The Baldwin government was completely successful in dealing with the General Strike of 1926.' How far do you agree with this statement?
- 4 To what extent did the TUC General Council bear the primary responsibility for the failure of the General Strike?

#### SOURCE ANALYSIS QUESTION

1 Assess the value of Source D (page 144) for revealing the attitudes and policy of the Conservative government during the General Strike. Explain your answer using the source, the information given about its origin and your own knowledge about the historical context.

# Edexcel A level History

## Sources guidance

Edexcel's Paper 3, Option 36.1: Protest, agitation and parliamentary reform in Britain, c.1780–1928 is assessed by an exam comprising three sections:

- Section A is a source analysis assessment. It tests your knowledge of one of the key topics in depth.
- Section B requires you to write one essay from a choice of two, again testing your knowledge of key topics in depth (see page 155 for guidance on this).
- Section C requires you to write one essay from a choice of two. Questions relate to themes in breadth and test your knowledge of change over a period of at least 100 years (see page 159 for guidance on this).

The sections of the exam relate to the sections of the paper in the following way:

	745 J	
Section A and Section B	Test your knowledge of the key topics in depth	Mass protest and agitation:  Radical reformers, c.1790–1819  Chartism, c.1838–c.1850  Contagious Diseases Acts and the campaign for their repeal, 1862–86  The Women's Social and Political Union, 1903–14  Trades union militancy, 1917–27
Section C	Tests your knowledge of the themes in breadth	Changes in representation in England, c.1780–1928:  Reform of Parliament  Changing influences in Parliament: the impact of parliamentary reform

The following advice relates to Paper 3, Section A. Paper 3 is only available at A level, therefore there is no AS level version of this paper.

## Paper 3 Section A

Section A of Paper 3 comprises a single compulsory question which refers to one source.

## The question

The Section A question will begin with the following stem: 'Assess the value of the source for revealing ...'.
For example:

Assess the value of this source for revealing the methods used by the government to control the Chartists and the attitudes of the Chartists to the government.

Explain your answer, using the source, the information given about its origin and your own knowledge about the historical context.

#### The source

The source will be a primary or contemporary source: it will have been written contemporary to c.1780-1928, the period that you are studying. The source will be around 350 words long. It will be accompanied by a brief passage which will set out the essential provenance of the source. Here is an example:

#### SOURCE I

From History of the Chartist Movement, 1837–1854 by Robert Gammage, published in 1854. This was the first published account of the Chartist movement. Gammage was a Chartist all his working life, becoming increasingly active as a Chartist lecturer as he travelled the Midlands and south of England looking for work. He was present in London at the time of the Kennington Common meeting about which he is writing here.

Various bodies continued to arrive on the Common with music and banners. Meanwhile, the Convention assembled at nine o'clock, where a letter from the Commissioner of Police was read out, stating that the contemplated procession to Parliament would on no account be allowed to take place. O'Connor delivered a precautionary speech; took the blame off the government for the preparations they had made, and placed it upon those who had talked of an armed insurrection.

When the carriage reached the Common, O'Connor was asked to go to the Horns' Tavern. Mr. Mayne, Commissioner of Police, was awaiting him. It was believed that O'Connor had been arrested, but this was an idle rumour. Mayne informed him that the government would not interfere with the meeting, but that the procession would not be allowed. He said the government had the means of preventing it and that those means would be used and that O'Connor would be held responsible. O'Connor promised that the procession should be abandoned. He had led the people to believe that he would head the procession to

Parliament and he had pledged himself to the police that it should be abandoned.

O'Connor then addressed the masses on the Common, commending them not to injure their cause by any act of folly. He pointed to the Petition, which he said contained the voices of five million seven hundred thousand of their countrymen, who would be looking for good conduct from them that day. He then told them that the Executive would accompany the Petition and urged them not to accompany it.

The meeting being at an end, the Petition was placed in three carriages. The Chartist delegation accompanied it to Parliament. The police guarded the bridges, and for upwards of an hour after the meeting, prevented any approach on the part of the people. Some endeavoured to cross the bridges, but the police used their staves, often with very little moderation. The masses, however, did not risk a collision with the police, and considering the tension previously existing, the day passed off in a singularly peaceful manner.

## Understanding the question

To answer the question successfully you must understand how the question works. The question is written precisely in order to make sure that you understand the task. Each part of the question has a specific meaning.

Assess the value of this source[1] for revealing the methods used by the government[2] to control the Chartists and the attitudes of the Chartists to the government[3].

Explain your answer, using the source, the information given about its origin and your own knowledge about the historical context.

- 1 You must evaluate how useful the source could be to a historian. Evaluating the extent of usefulness involves considering its value and limitations in the light of your own knowledge about the source's historical context. Important information about the context of the source is included in the information given about the source.
- 2 The question focuses on two specific enquiries that the source might be useful for. The first is the methods used by the government.
- 3 The second enquiry is the attitudes of the Chartists to the government.

You should use the source, the information about the source and your own knowledge of the historical context to make a judgement about how far the source is useful to a historian engaged in two specific enquiries. Crucially, you must consider both enquiries; an answer which only focuses on one of the enquiries is unlikely to do well.

## Source skills

Section A of Paper 3 tests your ability to evaluate source material. Your job is to analyse the source by reading it in the context of the values and assumptions of the society and the period from which it came.

Examiners will mark your work by focusing on the extent to which you are able to do the following:

- Interpret and analyse source material:
  - At a basic level, this means you can understand the source and select, copy, paraphrase and summarise the source to help answer the question.
  - At a higher level, your interpretation of the source includes the ability to explain, analyse and make inferences based on the source.
  - At the highest levels, you will be expected to analyse the source in a sophisticated way. This includes the ability to distinguish between information, opinions and arguments contained in the source.
- Deploy knowledge of historical context in relation to the source:
  - At a basic level, this means the ability to link the source to your knowledge of the context in which the source was written, using this knowledge to expand or support the information contained in the source.
  - At a higher level, you will be able to use your contextual knowledge to make inferences, and to expand, support or challenge the details mentioned in the source.
  - At the highest levels, you will examine the value and limits of the material contained in the source by interpreting the source in the context of the values and assumptions of the society from which it is taken.

- Evaluate the usefulness and weight of the source material:
  - At a basic level, evaluation of the source will be based on simplistic criteria about reliability and bias.
  - At a higher level, evaluation of the source will be based on the nature and purpose of the source.
  - At the highest levels, evaluation of the source will be based on a valid criterion that is justified in the course of the essay. You will also be able to distinguish between the value of different aspects of the source.

Make sure your source evaluation is sophisticated.

Avoid crude statements about bias and avoid simplistic assumptions such as that a source written immediately after an event is reliable, whereas a source written years later is unreliable.

Try to see things through the eyes of the writer:

- How does the writer understand the world?
- What assumptions does the writer have?
- Who is the writer trying to influence?
- What views is the writer trying to challenge?

## Basic skill: comprehension

The most basic source skill is comprehension: understanding what the source means. There are a variety of techniques that you can use to aid comprehension. For example, you could read the sources included in this book and in past papers. In this context you could:

- Read the sources out loud.
- Look up any words that you don't understand and make a glossary.
- Make flash cards containing brief biographies of the writers of the sources.

You can demonstrate comprehension by copying, paraphrasing and summarising the sources. However, keep this to the minimum as comprehension is a low-level skill and you need to leave room for higher-level skills.

## Advanced skill: contextualising the sources

First, to analyse the sources correctly you need to understand them in the context in which they were written. Source 1 reflects Robert Gammage's view. Your job is to understand the values and assumptions behind the source.

- One way of contextualising the source is to consider the nature, origins and purpose of the source. However, this can lead to a formulaic essay.
- An alternative is to consider two levels of context. First, you should establish the general context. In this case, Source 1 was published a few years after the events it describes. Second, you can look for specific references to contemporary events, people or debates in the sources. For example, when considering the methods used by the government, the details in the source can be put in context in the following way:
  - The 'letter from the Commissioner of Police' gives a clear warning that the procession would not 'be allowed', suggesting the government's resolution.
  - That warning was reiterated at the Common but the 'government would not interfere with the meeting' – as a concession or as fear of the consequences if it tried to ban it?
  - The government had the 'means of preventing' the procession, suggesting physical force.
  - Police 'guarded the bridges' and 'used their staves' to prevent Chartists crossing the Thames, a clear indication of government preparedness and willingness to use force.

## Use context to make judgements

- Start by establishing the general context of the source:
  - Ask yourself, what was going on at the time when the source was written, or the time of the events described in the source?
  - What are the key debates that the source might be contributing to?

- Next, look for key words and phrases that establish the specific context. Does the source refer to specific people, events or books that might be important?
- Make sure your contextualisation focuses on the question.
- Use the context when evaluating the usefulness and limitations of the source.

#### For example:

This text is valuable, as a first-hand source, for revealing the methods used by the government to control the Chartists. It was written a few years after the events it describes by a man with direct experience of Chartist meetings. Furthermore, Gammage was in the capital at the time of the meeting on London's Kennington Common.

The author writes of the Police Commissioner's 'letter' which was read out at the Chartist Convention, which clearly states that the procession to Parliament would on no account be allowed'. This shows the firm stand taken by the government, although we cannot tell whether this arises out of fear of an 'armed insurrection' or not. Later, when the 'carriage' carrying the petition 'reached the Common', the government showed, again through the 'Commissioner of Police', that it was being moderate in allowing the meeting to go ahead, although this stance could also arise out of fear of the consequences if it had banned the meeting. Nevertheless, the government was again sounding resolute in its determination to prevent the procession going to Parliament. Furthermore, the government seemed to be projecting its power in stating that it would use the 'means' at its disposal, which included several thousand troops, as well as police and tens of thousands of special constables, to prevent such a procession.

Later we read that the police 'guarded the bridges' and 'used their staves, often with very little moderation', to prevent the Chartists crossing the bridges over the Thames. This suggests a high level of preparedness and willingness to use force on the part of the authorities.

The measured, largely factual, account of this source suggests that it is even-handed and reliable despite the reference to the police's use of 'very little moderation', which is undoubtedly an opinion, although it may have been based on what the author saw.

This passage makes reference to details in the source to reveal the methods used by the government, showing that the passage is of considerable use for this enquiry. Significantly, in order to do well it would also have to deal with the other enquiry: the value of the source for revealing the attitudes of the Chartists to the government.

## Essay guidance (1)

## Paper 3 Section B

To get a high grade in Section B of Paper 3 your essay must contain four essential qualities:

- focused analysis
- relevant detail
- supported judgement
- organisation, coherence and clarity.

This section focuses on the following aspects of exam technique:

- The nature of the question.
- Planning your answer, including writing a focused introduction.
- Deploying relevant detail.
- Writing analytically.
- Reaching a supported judgement.

## The nature of the question

Section B questions are designed to test the depth of your historical knowledge. Therefore, they can focus on relatively short periods, or single events. Moreover, they can focus on different historical processes or 'concepts'. These include:

- cause
- consequence
- change and continuity
- similarity and differences
- significance.

These different question focuses will require slightly different approaches:

Cause	1 To what extent was hunger the cause of popular radicalism from 1790 to 1819?		
Consequence	2 'Far from harming the cause of votes for women, the WSPU had, by 1914, made it into one of the most important political issues of the day.' How far do you agree with this statement?		
Continuity and change	3 'Inept leadership characterised the leadership of the radical reformers from 1790 to 1819 and of the Chartists from 1837 to 1848.' To what extent do you agree with this statement?		
Similarities and differences	4 'A successful campaign requires effective leadership.' To what extent does this explain the success of the campaign for the repeal of the Contagious Diseases Acts in 1886 and the failure of the Women's Social and Political Union to obtain votes for women by 1914?		
Significance	5 'The report of the Samuel Commission of 1926 was the most significant development in the events from 1920 to 1926 that led to the outbreak of the General Strike.' How far do you agree with this statement?		

Some questions include a 'stated factor'. A common type of stated factor question would ask how far one factor caused something. For example, for question 1 in the table, 'To what extent was hunger the cause of popular radicalism from 1790 to 1819?', you would be expected to evaluate the importance of 'hunger as the cause of popular radicalism' – the 'stated factor' – compared to other factors.

## Planning your answer

It is crucial that you understand the focus of the question. Therefore, read the question carefully before you start planning. Check the following:

- The chronological focus: which years should your essay deal with?
- The topic focus: what aspect of your course does the question deal with?
- The conceptual focus: is this a causes, consequences, change/continuity, similarity/ difference or significance question?

For example, for question 5 in the table on page 155 you could point these out as follows:

'The report of the Samuel Commission of 1926[1] was the most significant development in the events[2] from 1920 to 1926[3] that led to the outbreak of the General Strike[4].' How far do you agree with this statement?

- 1 Topic focus: the Samuel Commission.
- 2 Conceptual focus: significance, specifically in the events leading to the General Strike.
- 3 Chronological focus: 1920-6.
- 4 Topic focus: the outbreak of the General Strike.

Your plan should reflect the task that you have been set. Section B asks you to write an analytical, coherent and well-structured essay from your own knowledge, which reaches a supported conclusion in around 40 minutes:

- To ensure that your essay is coherent and well structured, it should comprise a series of paragraphs, each focusing on a different point.
- Your paragraphs should come in a logical order.
   For example, you could write your paragraphs in order of importance, so you begin with the most important issues and end with the least important.
- In essays where there is a 'stated factor', it is a good idea to start with the stated factor before moving on to the other points.
- To make sure you keep to time, you should aim to write three or four paragraphs plus an introduction and a conclusion.

## The opening paragraph

The opening paragraph should do four main things:

- answer the question directly
- set out your essential argument
- outline the factors or issues that you will discuss
- define key terms used in the question where necessary.

Different questions require you to define different terms, for example:

'A successful campaign requires effective leadership.'
To what extent does this explain the success of the campaign for the repeal of the Contagious Diseases
Acts in 1886 and the failure of the Women's Social and Political Union to obtain votes for women by 1914?

Here, it is worth explaining what you think 'effective leadership' consists of.

To what extent do you agree with the view that Chartism was primarily the product of economic depression in the years from 1837 to 1848?

In this example, it is worth explaining what you mean by 'economic depression'.

Here is an example introduction in answer to question 4 in the table on page 155:

'A successful campaign requires effective leadership.'
To what extent does this explain the success of the campaign for the repeal of the Contagious Diseases Acts in 1886 and the failure of the Women's Social and Political Union to obtain votes for women by 1914?

Effective leadership was undoubtedly a major factor in the success of the campaign for repeal of the Contagious Diseases Acts, while flawed leadership contributed to the failure of the Women's Social and Political Union (WSPU) by 1914[1]. The leadership of the former was, like that of the WSPU dynamic and highly committed. However, unlike the WSPU, it maintained widespread support right up until the moment it achieved its objective[2]. By contrast, the leadership of the WSPU, while initially having an energising effect on the campaign for votes for women, proved to be

divisive, especially in the years from 1912 to 1914, and thus alienated many of its supporters and made the government less likely to concede votes for women[3].

- 1 The essay starts with a clear focus on the question.
- 2 This sentence highlights characteristics of effective leadership which were shared by both movements and then, crucially, identifies one characteristic, the ability to maintain support until success was achieved, which only the leadership of one movement managed.
- 3 This sentence identifies two characteristics of 'effective leadership' and shows how one was lacking in the years 1912–14 and thus contributed to the failure of the WSPU.

## The opening paragraph: advice

- Don't write more than a couple of sentences on general background knowledge. This is unlikely to focus explicitly on the question.
- After defining key terms, refer back to these definitions when justifying your conclusion.
- The introduction should reflect the rest of the essay. Don't make one argument in your introduction and then make a different argument in the essay.

## Deploying relevant detail

Paper 3 tests the depth of your historical knowledge. Therefore, you will need to deploy historical detail. In the main body of your essay your paragraphs should begin with a clear point, be full of relevant detail and end with explanation or evaluation. A detailed answer might include statistics, proper names, dates and technical terms. For example, if you were writing a paragraph about the divisive leadership of the WSPU in the years 1912–14, you might refer to the expulsion from the organisation, by Christabel Pankhurst, of Frederick and Emmeline Pethwick-Lawrence.

## Writing analytically

The quality of your analysis is one of the key factors that determines the mark you achieve. Writing analytically means clearly showing the relationships between the ideas in your essay. Analysis includes two key skills: explanation and evaluation.

#### Explanation

Explanation means giving reasons. An explanatory sentence has three parts:

- a claim: a statement that something is true or false
- a reason: a statement that justifies the claim
- a relationship: a word or phrase that shows the relationship between the claim and the reason.

Imagine that you are answering question 1 in the table on page 155:

To what extent was hunger the cause of popular radicalism from 1790 to 1819?

Your paragraph on hunger as the cause of popular radicalism should start with a clear point, which would be supported by a series of examples. You would then round off the paragraph with some explanation:

Therefore, hunger was one cause of popular radicalism from 1790 to 1819[1] because it was in times of greatest hunger and hardship that the radical movement attracted widespread, genuinely popular, support[2], thus suggesting that hunger was a significant cause[3].

- 1 Claim.
- 2 Supporting examples.
- 3 Reason.

Make sure of the following:

- The reason you give genuinely justifies the claim you have made.
- Your explanation is focused on the question.

## Reaching a supported judgement

Your essay should reach a supported judgement. The obvious place to do this is in the conclusion of your essay. Even so, the judgement should reflect the findings of your essay. The conclusion should present:

- a clear judgement that answers the question
- an evaluation of the evidence that supports the judgement.

Finally, the evaluation should reflect valid criteria.

#### **Evaluation and criteria**

Evaluation means weighing up to reach a judgement. Therefore, evaluation requires you to:

- summarise both sides of the issue
- reach a conclusion that reflects the proper weight of both sides.

So, for question 1 in the table on page 155:

To what extent was hunger the cause of popular radicalism from 1790 to 1819?

the conclusion might look like this:

In conclusion, although hunger was a major underlying cause of popular radicalism, it was the belief that better living conditions, and thus the alleviation of hunger, could only be improved by radical reform that generated mass support for the movement[1]. It is undoubtedly the case that radicalism attracted most support in times of economic hardship[2], such as in 1816-17, and that support waned when conditions improved, as in the early 1820s. Hunger and hardship helped to enlist mass support[3]. However, in the 1790s, it was the French Revolution, and particularly the writings of Tom Paine, not hunger, that fuelled popular radicalism. Then, in the years from 1815 to 1819, it was the belief that 'class legislation' and harsh taxation contributed to the hunger experienced by the masses and could only be relieved by radical parliamentary reform that provided widespread, popular support for the radical movement. Hunger increased the intensity of

popular agitation and aided the radical reformers in winning support but it was the belief in the importance and possibility of changing the political system that provided the backbone of popular radicalism[4].

- 1 The conclusion starts with a clear judgement that answers the question.
- 2 This sentence begins the process of weighing up the importance of the stated factor, that is, 'hunger'.
- 3 The conclusion summarises the importance of hunger in recruiting mass support for radicalism.
- 4 The essay ends with a final judgement that is supported by the evidence of the essay.

The judgement is supported in part by evaluating the evidence, and in part by linking it to valid criteria. In this case, one such criterion is the distinction between the role of hunger in agitating the masses and the importance of enlisting popular support for an essentially political movement.

## Essay guidance (2)

## Paper 3 Section C

Section C is similar in many ways to Section B. Therefore, you need the same essential skills in order to get a high grade:

- focused analysis
- relevant detail
- supported judgement
- organisation, coherence and clarity.

Nonetheless, there are some differences in terms of the style of the question and the approach to the question in Sections B and C. Therefore, this section focuses on the following aspects of exam technique:

- The nature of the question.
- Planning your answer.
- Advice for Section C.

## The nature of the question

Section C questions focus on the two themes in breadth:

- Reform of Parliament.
- Changing influences in Parliament: the impact of parliamentary reform.

Questions can address either theme or both themes. There are two questions in Section C, of which you must answer one. However, you are not guaranteed a question on both themes, therefore you have to prepare for questions on both of the themes.

Section C questions are designed to test the breadth of your historical knowledge and your ability to analyse change over time. Therefore, questions will focus on long periods, of no less than 100 years.

Section C questions have a variety of forms but they have one of two essential foci. They will focus on either:

 the causes of change: for example, the factors, forces or individuals that led to change

or

 the nature of change: the ways in which things changed.

Significantly, the exam paper may contain two causes of change questions or two nature of change questions: you are not guaranteed one of each. Finally, questions can focus on different aspects of change over time:

- Comparative questions: ask you to assess the extent of change and continuity of an aspect of the period.
- Patterns of change questions: ask you to assess differences in terms of the rate, extent or significance of change at different points in the chronology.
- Turning point questions: ask you to assess which changes were more significant.

Comparative question	'In the years 1815–1928, the reform of parliamentary representation was driven primarily by pressure from those excluded from the franchise.' How far do you agree with this statement?
Patterns of change question	How accurate is it to say that there was a continuously changing development in the relationship between the House of Commons and the House of Lords in the years 1815–1928?
Turning point question	To what extent was the second Representation of the People (Reform) Act 1867 the key turning point in the development of political parties in the years 1790–1928?

## Planning your answer

It is crucial that you understand the focus of the question in order to make an effective plan. Therefore, read the question carefully before you start planning. Different questions require a different approach. Here are suggestions about how to tackle some of the common types of question:

'In the years 1815–1928, the reform of parliamentary representation was driven primarily by pressure from those excluded from the franchise.' How far do you agree with this statement?

This is a comparative question which focuses on the causes of change. In this case you should examine the significance of 'pressure from those excluded from the franchise', the stated factor, and compare it to other possible causes of change.

How accurate is it to say that there was a continuously changing development in the relationship between the House of Commons and the House of Lords in the years 1815–1928?

This is a patterns of change question which focuses on the nature of change. Here, you should examine the pattern of the development in the relationship between the House of Commons and the House of Lords in the period 1815–1928. You should consider how far development took place at an even rate, as opposed to developing in fits and starts.

To what extent was the second Representation of the People (Reform) Act 1867 the key turning point in the development of political parties in the years 1790–1928?

This is a turning point question which focuses on the nature of change. Therefore, you should examine the significance of the stated turning point, and compare it to two or three other turning points from the period 1790–1928. Significantly, you should not just focus on the impact of the second Representation of the People (Reform) Act; you must consider other possible turning points. Additionally, when considering how far an event was a turning point you must consider both the changes it caused and the ways in which things stayed the same.

## Advice for Section C

In many ways a Section C essay should display the same skills as a Section B essay (see page 155). However, Section C essays focus on a much longer period than Section B essays and this has an impact on how you approach them.

The most important difference concerns the chronology. In order to answer a Section C question properly you must address the whole chronology, in this case the period 1790–1928. In practice, this means choosing examples from across the whole range of the period. Specifically, it is a good idea to have examples from the early part of the period, the middle of the period and the end of the period. For example, consider the following question:

To what extent was the second Representation of the People (Reform) Act 1867 the key turning point in the development of political parties in the years 1790–1928?

The question states a possible turning point from 1867 – the middle of the period. Therefore, if you are considering other possible turning points you should choose one from the early part of the chronology, such as 1832, and one or two from the later part, such as 1884–5 and 1918, to make sure you cover the whole period.

Equally, if you are dealing with the question:

How accurate is it to say that there was a continuously changing development in the relationship between the House of Commons and the House of Lords in the years 1815–1928?

you should analyse periods of little or no change in the relationship as well as examples/periods of significant change (such as 1911) throughout the whole period in order to explain whether there was a *continuously* changing development in the relationship. In so doing, you would be addressing the full chronological range of the question.

# Glossary of terms

**Act of Catholic Emancipation** An Act of Parliament allowing Roman Catholics the right to become MPs or to hold other public office.

Agents provocateurs Men employed by the government whose job was to infiltrate radical groups and provoke them into taking actions which would lead to their arrest.

**Aristocracy** The nobles, or peers, who inherited landed titles which gave them the right to sit in the House of Lords.

**Bill** A proposal for a new law which, if passed, becomes an Act of Parliament.

Birmingham Political Union (BPU) Formed in 1830 by Thomas Attwood, a banker from Birmingham, in order to campaign for parliamentary reform. It attracted middle- and working-class support although Attwood did not believe in universal suffrage.

**Capital offence** A crime which carried the death penalty.

**Caucus** A term originating in the USA to mean a group or meeting of members of a political party.

**'Class legislation'** Law or laws passed to favour one particular class, in this case the landed class.

**Coalition government** Government made up of members of more than one party.

**Compulsory arbitration** Enforced settlement of a dispute by a judge.

**Conservative** This term came into use at the time of the Tamworth Manifesto when Peel promised that he would *conserve* the nation's institutions. Nevertheless, the term 'Tory' continued to be used as well.

**Corn Laws** Laws which imposed tariffs, or import duties, on foreign wheat. In fact, the import of wheat was banned until the price of British wheat reached 80 shillings (£4) a quarter (about 13 kg).

**Crimean War** A war, 1854–6, in which Britain and France fought Russia.

**Cross-party** Involving two or more political parties.

'Days of May' The tense days in early May 1832 when the king refused to create new peers, Wellington tried to form a government, some huge demonstrations were held and there was even talk of armed conflict.

**Declaration of the Rights of Man** A document outlining the rights of citizens in France.

**Deferential** Showing respect for people, in this case for those of a 'higher' class.

**Direct and indirect taxes** Direct taxes, like income tax, were paid directly to the State. Indirect taxes were paid on goods as part of the price paid when purchasing those goods.

**Disenfranchise** Deny the right to a seat in Parliament.

**Evangelical Christians** Christians who believed that God called on them to do good, for example for social and moral improvement.

**French Revolution** A series of events, starting in 1789, which led to the fall of the monarchy and of the aristocracy in France.

**General strike** Several unions coming out on strike together.

Habeas corpus A Latin phrase meaning 'you have the body'. The law of habeas corpus said that anyone arrested had to be charged with an offence and brought before a court. The government resorted to the suspension of habeas corpus again, in 1817.

**Hampden Club** This was named after John Hampden, a harsh critic of the king's government at the start of the civil war in the seventeenth century.

**Independent Labour Party (ILP)** A political party founded in 1893 to promote working-class interests.

**Labour Representation Committee (LRC)** A body formed to improve the lives of working people through parliamentary action. It later became the Labour Party.

**Lichfield House Compact** A meeting of Whigs, Radicals and Irish MPs held at the house of Lord Lichfield in February 1834. They agreed to form an alliance to defeat Peel's Conservative government. **Lobbying** An organised attempt by people, with a special interest, to influence lawmakers, for example by putting pressure on MPs.

**London Corresponding Society (LCS)** Set up to campaign for manhood suffrage and to correspond (write to and make links) with other reforming groups.

Manhood suffrage The right to vote for all adult men.

**Militancy** The active championing of a cause or belief, sometimes with the use of force.

National Charter Association (NCA) A national, political organisation. It set up branches across Britain and members paid subscriptions to join. Many historians see it as the first independent, working-class political party, a forerunner of the Labour Party.

**Nationalisation** Taking into public ownership (government control).

**Nominee** Someone who is put forward for election. Over 200 MPs were nominated by an aristocratic patron who sat in the Lords. In other words, members of the House of Lords had huge control over the composition of the House of Commons.

**Nonconformists** People who were Protestants but not members of the Church of England. Examples were Baptists, Quakers, Presbyterians and Methodists.

'Out of doors' Political activity beyond Parliament, for example, agitation 'out of doors' meant agitation in the country as a whole.

**Patronage** The practice of appointing people to government positions in order to secure their political support.

**Peelites** The name given to Conservatives who supported Peel over the repeal of the Corn Laws.

**Pocket borough** A borough constituency that was in the control, hence the pocket, of a particular patron, usually a large landowner. The majority were controlled by Tories.

**Political unions** Popular organisations created to campaign for reform of Parliament.

**Polling station** A place where you go to vote.

**Private member's bill** A parliamentary bill put forward by an individual MP.

**Radical** 'Radix' is Latin word for 'root', hence radical reform is fundamental reform – from the roots.

'Red Clydeside' Red is the colour associated with radical, left-wing politics, which characterised Glasgow, particularly the areas on the River Clyde, at this time.

Regent The future king, George IV.

**Rescue workers** People who cared for prostitutes or 'fallen women' as they were called in Victorian times.

**Residuum** Literally something left behind, the residue.

**Revolutionary Russia** In October 1917, Russian Communist revolutionaries had taken power under Lenin and then called on workers everywhere to do the same and overthrow their governments.

**Rotten borough** A borough with few or no constituents yet which returned at least one MP to Parliament.

**Rough-sharpening** Sharpening swords in such a way that they would inflict 'a ragged wound', one more likely to fester and cause slow death.

**Secret ballot** Casting a vote in secret, as is done today.

**Seditious** Using language encouraging rebellion against the State.

**Socialist** One who advocates State control of parts of the economy and greater social equality.

**Staple industries** The industries on which Britain's economic strength had traditionally been based, for example coal, iron, shipbuilding and textiles.

**Suburbs** Areas of mostly middle-class, residential housing on the outskirts of cities. Living in the suburbs, while working in the urban areas, was made possible by the development of the railways.

**Suffragettes** Women who sought the vote using more confrontational, sometimes violent, means. The term was first used by a journalist in the *Daily Mail*.

**Suffragists** Women who sought the vote using peaceful means.

**Tamworth Manifesto** A letter, addressed to Robert Peel's Tamworth constituents in 1846, in which he set

out to show that the Tories were willing to accept and initiate reform.

**Trades Union Congress (TUC)** The body created in 1868 to represent the unions collectively.

Transported Sent to a penal colony, often Australia.

**Ulster Unionists** Members of an organisation that wanted the province of Ulster, in Ireland, to remain British. They threatened to rebel when the Liberal government planned to give self-government to Ireland.

**Universal suffrage** The vote for all people. In practice, at this time, it meant for all men (manhood suffrage).

Venereal disease Sexually transmitted disease.

Victorian Britain Britain during Queen Victoria's reign from 1837 to 1901.

War of American Independence This lasted from 1776 to 1783 and ended with Britain recognising the independence of the colonies which became the United States of America.

Women's Social and Political Union (WSPU) Founded in 1903 by Emmeline Pankhurst to campaign for votes for women. They were more militant than the suffragists of the NUWSS.

**Workhouse** Sometimes known as the poorhouse, it was the place where those who were too poor or unable to look after themselves had to go for food and shelter.

# Further reading

## General texts

Hugh Cunningham, The Challenge of Democracy, Britain 1832–1918 (Pearson, 2001)

Chapters 2, 5 and 9 are particularly useful on parliamentary reform and steps taken, often unwittingly, towards the emergence of democracy

Eric Evans, The Forging of the Modern State, Early Industrial Britain, 1783–1870 (Routledge, 2001)

A reliable, academic textbook study

Eric Evans, Parliamentary Reform, c.1770–1918 (Longman Seminar Studies, 2000)

An excellent, very readable interpretation of the development and impact of parliamentary reform over the whole period

Sean Lang, Parliamentary Reform, 1785–1928 (Routledge, 1999)

Combines narrative, interpretive essays and sources

Robert Pearce and Roger Stearn, Government and Reform: Britain, 1815–1918 (Hodder & Stoughton, 1985)

An explanatory narrative of how Britain became more democratic over the century covered

Michael Scott-Baumann, editor, Years of Expansion, British History 1815–1914 (Hodder & Stoughton, 1992) An A level textbook which covers most of the topics dealt with in this book

Michael Willis, Democracy and the State, 1830–1945 (Cambridge University Press, 1999)

The first three chapters deal with electoral reform and its impact on government

## Chapter 1

M. Cole and D. Hartley, '1832: An Unseen Advance for Democracy', Modern History Review, November 1997
This article and the one by Foster (above) both examine the pre-1832 electoral system

Eric Evans, Britain before the Reform Act (Routledge, 2014)

An examination of British politics and society before 1832, it will also be useful for Chapter 4 on radical politics R.E. Foster, 'Reflections on the Unreformed Electoral System', Modern History Review, September 2000 This article and the one by Cole and Hartley (below) both examine the pre-1832 electoral system

## Chapter 2

M. Brock, The Great Reform Act (Hutchinson, 1973)
An excellent, detailed study of the passing of the
Reform Act

John Cannon, Parliamentary Reform, 1640–1832 (Cambridge University Press, 1972)

A classic and comprehensive account; Chapters 9–11 are particularly relevant

Eric Evans, The Great Reform Act of 1832 (Routledge, 1994)

A very accessible account of the passing of the 1832 Act

Edward Pearce, Reform! – The Fight for the 1832 Reform Act (Jonathan Cape, 2003)

A lively, well-researched account by someone who spent 25 years as a commentator on parliamentary debates

## Chapter 3

J. Belchem, Class, Party and the Political System in Britain 1867–1914 (Blackwell, 1990)

Covering the period after 1867, this book focuses on political parties and the historical debate over their development

Michael Lynch, Lloyd George and the Liberal Dilemma (Hodder & Stoughton, 1993)

A mixture of narrative and analysis, written with students in mind

Michael Smith, 'Parliamentary Reform and the Electorate', in Chris Williams, editor, *A Companion to Nineteenth-century Britain* (Blackwell, 2004)

A good, analytical survey of the impact of parliamentary reform

John K. Walton, *The Second Reform Act* (Routledge, 1999)

A good, accessible account of the passing and impact of the Act

## Chapter 4

J. Belchem, 'Orator' Hunt: Henry Hunt and English Working Class Radicalism (Breviary Stuff Publications, 2012)

An examination of Hunt's role in the popular radical movement

H.T. Dickinson, *British Radicalism and the French Revolution*, 1789–1815 (Blackwell, 1985)

An incisive analysis, particularly useful on the 1790s

E.P. Thompson, The Making of the English Working Class (Penguin, 2013)

A provocative and hugely influential book; Chapters 4, 5, 6 and 15 are particularly recommended for a scholarly student

## Chapter 5

Eric Evans, 'Chartism Revisited', *History Review*, March 1999, and Miles Taylor, 'Putting the Politics Back into Chartism', *Modern History Review*, April 1999 Both of these are stimulating, short articles

Edward Royle, Chartism (Longman, 1996)

A survey of the origins and development of the movement, this book also examines key themes like strategy, leadership and local organisation

D. Thompson, *The Chartists: Popular Politics in the Industrial Revolution* (Temple Smith, 1984).

A highly regarded book which explores the roles of particular groups within the movement

John K. Walton, Chartism (Routledge, 1999)
Focuses on the key themes and analyses the main debates about the movement

## Chapter 6

Paula Bartley, The Changing Role of Women 1815–1914 (Hodder & Stoughton, 1996)

Chapter 5 sets the issue of prostitution and the Acts in the wider context

Lesley A. Hall, 'Sexuality', in Chris Williams, editor,

A Companion to Nineteenth-century Britain (Blackwell,
2004)

A useful essay on Victorian attitudes

Judith Walkowitz, *Prostitution and Victorian Society* (Cambridge University Press, 1990)

Long regarded as the classic study on this topic, Part 1 focuses on prostitution itself, Part 2 on the campaigns

for the passing, and the repeal, of the Contagious Diseases Acts

## Chapter 7

Paula Bartley, Votes for Women (Hodder & Stoughton, 1998)

Examines the role of the WSPU in the context of the whole campaign for female suffrage

Sandra Stanley Holton, Feminism and Democracy: Women's Suffrage and Reform Politics in Britain, 1897–1918 (Cambridge University Press, 1986)

Examines the ethos of the suffrage movement and the impact of the nineteenth-century campaign before assessing the WSPU

Martin Pugh, The March of the Women (Oxford University Press, 2000)

Part 3 focuses on the militancy of the WSPU and analyses the reasons for its impact as well as for its failure to achieve its goal by 1914

June Purvis and Sandra Stanley Holton, editors, Votes for Women (Routledge, 1999)

Reviews the historiography and charts the history of the movement in Britain. The introductory chapter is extremely useful, as are chapters on the WSPU

## Chapter 8

Keith Laybourn, A History of British Trade Unionism (Sutton, 1992)

Puts the years 1917–27 into wider context. Chapter 5 is particularly relevant

Keith Laybourn, *The General Strike of 1926* (Manchester University Press, 1993)

A good read, the whole of this short book is highly recommended

Henry Pelling, A History of British Trade Unionism (Pelican, 1976)

Chapter 8 of this very good book deals with the years 1914–26

G.A. Phillips, The General Strike: The Politics of Industrial Conflict (Weidenfeld & Nicolson, 1976)
A highly regarded study by a specialist in the field

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