

Timeline of events

- 1836** - the London Working Men's Association was formed
- 1837** - the LWMA drew up the People's Charter with its six points
- 1838** - the six points were adopted by Chartists from across Britain
- 1839** - February - the Chartist National Convention met in London
- 1839** - July - the first National Petition was rejected by parliament
- 1839** - serious Chartist disturbances took place in Llanidloes and Newport
- 1842** - the second Chartist petition was rejected by parliament
- 1848** - a mass meeting of Chartists on Kennington Common, London
- 1848** - the third Chartist petition was rejected

Important concept

Chartism was one of the first mass working class movements in history. After the disappointment of the Great Reform Act the working classes joined the Chartism movement as it campaigned to give the vote to the working classes. In the short term, parliament resisted the demands of the Chartists, and the working classes were left without the vote. However, in the long term most of the demands of Chartism were achieved.

*From East to West, from North to South, let us proclaim the Charter!
We'll send all tyrants right about, who dare oppose the Charter.*
The opening lines of a poem written by Feargus O'Connor while in York gaol.

Key words

trade unions	organisations of working men set up to improve wages and working conditions
workhouse	a building to which poor or unemployed people were sent to work, in exchange for food and shelter
secret ballot	a ballot in which votes are made in secret, usually on paper
moral force Chartists	Chartists who believed in achieving reform through peaceful methods
physical force Chartists	Chartists who were prepared to use violence to achieve their aims
the six points of the Charter	the six main reform demands of the Chartists



The reasons for the rise of Chartism

Workers were disappointed with the Great Reform Act. During the 1830s and 40s working and living conditions remained poor. The government was still hostile to trade unions, while the introduction of workhouses had also angered the working class.

However, radicalism had not completely died. Working men again began to campaign for parliamentary reform as a way to improve their lives. In the 1830s, groups like the **London Working Men's Association** and the Birmingham Political Union led the demand for further reform.

In 1837 the London Working Men's Association drew up **the People's Charter**, with the following six demands:

1. A **vote for every man at twenty-one** years of age.
2. A **secret ballot** to protect the elector.
3. **No property qualifications** for MPs so that a constituency could elect a man of their choice, rich or poor.
4. **Payment of MPs** to allow working men to become MPs.
5. **Equal sized constituencies** giving the same amount of representation for the same number of electors.
6. **Annual parliaments** to prevent bribery and corruption.

William Lovett and Feargus O'Connor

The two best known Chartist leaders were **William Lovett** and **Feargus O'Connor**.

Lovett was secretary of the LWMA. He was a **"moral force" Chartist** who wanted to **achieve reform through peaceful means**.

O'Connor owned the Northern Star newspaper and used it to spread his ideas about Chartism. He was a **"physical force" Chartist** who believed in **using violence if necessary**.

As a result, Chartism split into two main groups – moral force Chartists and physical force Chartists.

The National Convention and the Chartist Petitions

In **1838** Chartist groups from across Britain adopted the **six points of the People's Charter** and organised a **national petition** to present to Parliament. In **February 1839 a National Chartist Convention** met in London to decide future strategy. However, the 'moral force' Chartists walked out of the meeting when physical force Chartists proposed the use of violence. The Government became alarmed and put the military on alert.

In **July 1839 the first petition**, which claimed to have over 1,280,000 signatures, was **rejected by Parliament**. There were widespread disturbances (see below) and many Chartists were imprisoned, including Lovett and O'Connor. A **second petition in 1842** was also **rejected**. There were strikes across the country.

In **1848** O'Connor organised a **mass meeting on Kennington Common in London**. However, **only 20,000 Chartists turned up** and they were outnumbered by police. A **third petition** was found to contain forgeries and was again rejected. These events marked the end of Chartism.

Chartism in Wales: the march on Newport and events at Llanidloes (1839)

In Wales, Chartists were active in **the valleys of South Wales** and the **"wool towns"** of mid Wales. Both areas experienced serious disturbances in 1839.

Large numbers of **mill workers** from Newtown, Welshpool and Llanidloes joined the Chartists. The arrest of local Chartist leaders in April led to a crowd marching on **the Trewythen Hotel in Llanidloes** and releasing the men. **For a few days the town was in Chartist control**. Troops were sent for who subsequently restored order. Three local leaders were arrested and sentenced to transportation.

During the summer of 1839 **Chartists in Gwent began to plan a march on Newport** as part of a national uprising. However, the authorities knew about it in advance. When the Chartists arrived in Newport on **November 4th, 30 soldiers had been stationed** in the Westgate Hotel in readiness. As the Chartist tried to enter the hotel **the soldiers opened fire, killing at least 22**. The leaders were arrested; John Frost, Zephaniah Williams and William Jones were put on trial and sentenced to being transported to Australia.