



Unemployment and the Poor Law of 1834

Mechanisation in the textile and agricultural industries caused significant job losses in Wales. The end of the Napoleonic Wars added to unemployment, as over 300,000 demobilised soldiers and sailors returned. Declining wartime industries, like iron and textiles, along with falling corn prices from good harvests, led to wage cuts and the Corn Laws of 1815, which restricted imports and raised food prices, worsening poverty. The Poor Law Amendment Act of 1834 further deteriorated conditions by standardising poor relief through harsh workhouses, causing social unrest and increased crime.

Radicalism and the Great Reform Act

Thomas Paine's *Rights of Man* inspired the working classes to demand political reform, leading to the formation of Corresponding Societies and a growing Radical movement in Wales and England. The 1832 Great Reform Act redistributed parliamentary seats to better represent growing industrial towns and increased the number of eligible voters from 400,000 to 650,000 by lowering property qualifications, though it still excluded the working classes and women.

The People's Charter

The Chartists list of demands:

1. Every man, 21 years of age or older, to be allowed to vote.
2. A secret ballot.
3. MPs should not have to own property.
4. MPs to receive a salary, so working-class men could be MPs.
5. Constituencies should be of equal size to ensure fair representation.
6. Annual parliaments to reduce corruption.

Chartism – Timeline

1836	The London Working Men's Association is founded by William Lovett and Henry Hetherington. Hugh Williams forms a WMA in Carmarthen.
1838	The People's Charter is launched, outlining six key demands for political reform.
1839	The first Chartist petition, with over 1.2 million signatures, is presented to Parliament but is rejected. Disturbances in Llanidloes take place in April. The Newport Rising occurs in November.
1840	The National Charter Association is established to unite local Chartist groups.
1842	The second Chartist petition, with over three million signatures, is also rejected. The Plug Plot Riots, a series of strikes, take place.
1848	The third Chartist petition is presented after a large rally at Kennington Common but is again rejected. This year marks the peak of Chartist activity.

Feargus O'Connor and William Lovett

Feargus O'Connor and William Lovett had significant ideological differences within the Chartist movement. O'Connor advocated 'physical force' Chartism and believed use of violence was necessary to succeed. He was opposed by Lovett's 'moral force' approach, which emphasised peaceful, educational and moral reform.

The Newport Rising

In autumn 1839, South-East Wales had significant industrial unrest, leading local Chartists, under John Frost, to plan an armed uprising in Newport. Despite plans to coordinate with Yorkshire failing, Frost and a crowd of 7,000 to 10,000 marched on Newport, resulting in a violent clash with troops at the Westgate Hotel, leaving around 24 dead and 50 injured. Following the uprising, authorities regained control, arresting 125 Chartists, including Frost, who was sentenced to life transportation. The government's crackdown effectively stifled the movement, leading to the decline of Chartism by 1840.

The impact of Chartism

Though the Chartist movement didn't accomplish all of its immediate objectives, it left a lasting mark on British society. It heightened awareness of social and political issues, paving the way for major reforms, like expanded voting rights, the secret ballot and paid positions for MPs. Additionally, the movement inspired future working-class organisations and laid the groundwork for further democratic progress in Britain.

