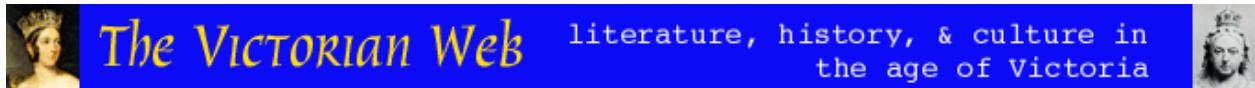


Chartism, Text 1



By Glenn Everett, formerly Associated Professor of English, University of Tennessee at Martin

The "People's Charter," drafted in 1838 by William Lovett, was at the heart of a radical campaign for parliamentary reform of the inequities remaining after the Reform Act of 1832.

The Chartists' six main demands were:

- votes for all men;
- equal electoral districts;
- abolition of the requirement that Members of Parliament be property owners;
- payment for M.P.s;
- annual general elections; and the secret ballot.

The Chartists obtained one and a quarter million signatures and presented the Charter to the House of Commons in 1839, where it was rejected by a vote of 235 to 46. Many of the leaders of the movement, having threatened to call a general strike, were arrested. When demonstrators marched on the prison at Newport, Monmouthshire, demanding the release of their leaders, troops opened fire, killing 24 and wounding 40 more. A second petition with 3 million signatures was rejected in 1842; the rejection of the third petition in 1848 brought an end to the movement.

More important than the movement itself was the unrest it symbolized. The Chartists' demands, at the time, seemed radical; those outside the movement saw the unrest and thought of the French Revolution and The Reign of Terror. Thomas Carlyle's pamphlet *Chartism* (1839), argued the need for reform by fanning these fears, though he later became increasingly hostile to democratic ideas in works like "Hudson's Statue". Historians theorize broadly about why this revolutionary movement died out just as the revolutions of 1848 were breaking out all over Europe, but from this distance we can only suppose that the English had a confidence in their government and a sense of optimism about their future possibilities which suggested to them that patience was better than violence; and in fact most of their demands were eventually met — specifically in the Reform Acts of 1867 and 1884. The threat of unrest surely influenced such otherwise unrelated reforms as the Factory act and the repeal of the Corn Laws. The radicalism that surfaced in the agitation for the Charter and a desire for a working-class voice in foreign affairs eventually channelled itself into related areas like the Socialist movement.

Source: <http://www.victorianweb.org/history/hist3.html>

Chartism, Text 2

Encyclopaedia Britannica (CD-ROM, 2006), entry: **Chartism**

... a British working-class movement for parliamentary reform named after the People's Charter, a bill drafted by the London radical William Lovett in May 1838. It contained six demands: universal manhood suffrage, equal electoral districts, vote by ballot,

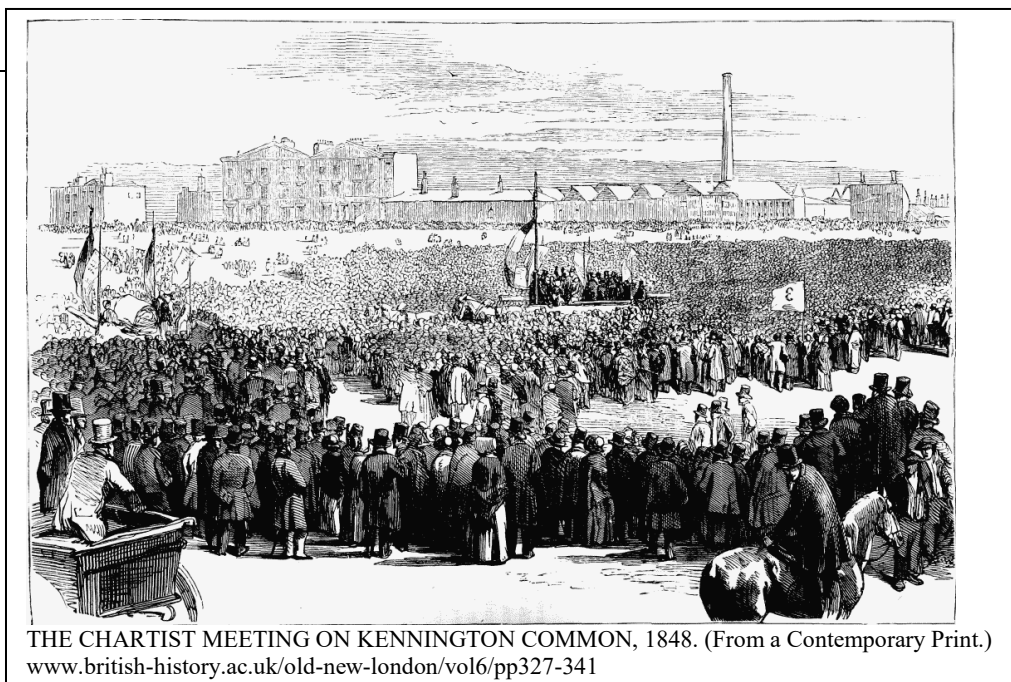
annually elected Parliaments, payment of members of Parliament, and abolition of the property qualifications for membership. Chartism was the first movement both working class in character and national in scope that grew out of the protest against the injustices of the new industrial and political order in Britain. While composed of working people, Chartism was also mobilized around populism as well as clan identity.

The movement was born amid the economic depression of 1837–38, when high unemployment and the effects of the Poor Law Amendment Act of 1834 were felt in all parts of Britain. Lovett's charter provided a programme acceptable to a heterogeneous working-class population. The movement swelled to national importance under the vigorous leadership of the Irishman Feargus Edward O'Connor, who stumped the nation in 1838 in support of the six points. [...]

A Chartist convention met in London in February 1839 to prepare a petition to present to Parliament. “Ulterior measures” were threatened should Parliament ignore the demands, but the delegates differed in their degrees of militancy and over what form “ulterior measures” should take. In May the convention moved to Birmingham, where riots led to the arrest of its moderate leaders Lovett and John Collins.

The rump of the convention returned to London and presented its petition in July. Parliament rejected it summarily. There followed in November an armed rising of the “physical force” Chartists at Newport, which was quickly suppressed. Its principal leaders were banished to Australia, and nearly every other Chartist leader was arrested and sentenced to a short prison term. The Chartists then started to emphasize efficient organization and moderate tactics. Three years later a second national petition was presented containing more than three million signatures, but again Parliament refused to consider it. The movement lost some of its mass support later in the 1840s as the economy revived. Also, the movement to repeal the Corn Laws divided radical energies, and several discouraged Chartist leaders turned to other projects.

The last great burst of Chartism occurred in 1848. Another convention was summoned, and another petition was prepared. Again Parliament did nothing. Thereafter, Chartism lingered another decade in the provinces, but its appeal as a national mass movement was ended. With the onset of the relative prosperity of mid-Victorian Britain, popular militancy lost its edge. Many Chartist leaders, however, schooled in the ideological debates of the 1840s, continued to serve popular causes, and the Chartist spirit outlasted the organization. Five of the six points—all except the annual Parliaments—have since been secured.



THE CHARTIST MEETING ON KENNINGTON COMMON, 1848. (From a Contemporary Print.)
www.british-history.ac.uk/old-new-london/vol6/pp327-341

Annotations:

charter (n.)	<i>Charta, Urkunde</i>	scope (n.)	<i>(Geltungs-) Bereich</i>
inequity (n.)	<i>Ungleichheit</i>	populism (n.)	<i>Populismus</i>
ballot (n.)	<i>Wahl(gang)</i>	heterogeneous (adj.)	<i>unterschiedlich (in der Zusammensetzung)</i>
obtain (v.)	<i>erhalten</i>	swell (v.)	<i>anwachsen</i>
petition (n.)	<i>Petition, Bittschrift</i>	vigorous (adj.)	<i>kräftig, energisch, stark</i>
pamphlet (n.)	<i>Flugschrift, Streitschrift</i>	stump (v.)	<i>hier: Wahlreden halten</i>
suffrage (n.)	<i>Wahlrecht</i>	ulterior (adj.)	<i>weitergehend</i>
annual (adj.)	<i>jährlich</i>	summarily (adv.)	<i>kurzangebunden, kurzgefasst</i>
property qualification (n.)	<i>hier: Bindung des Wahlrechts an Immobilienbesitz</i>	summon (v.)	<i>einberufen</i>

Tasks:

- Extract the main demands of Chartism.
- Conduct an internet research on the Corn Laws and the Factory Acts (mentioned at the end of the first text) and relate them to Chartism.
- Define ‘populism’ (mentioned in the second text). You might want to consult the internet. Then discuss if Chartism can rightly be classified as a form of ‘populism’.
- Assess the historical significance (importance) of Chartism.
- Compare Chartism to progressive politics in Germany in the mid-19th century.



The Chartist meeting held at Kennington Common on 10 April 1848.
Source: By William Edward Kilburn (1818 - 1891) Details of artist on Google Art Project [Public domain], via Wikimedia Commons