

## Labor, Violence, & Democratization in England

The following years saw extensive labor-related violence in England:

1811-1813 -- “Luddites” purposefully smashed new textile machines as a protest for the mechanization that was displacing more traditional weaving methods. They were also protesting the sped-up, intensified working conditions of industrial workers

1815-1817

1819 -- “Peterloo Massacre.” In the summer of 1819, 60,000 men, women and children, many of them weavers, gathered to demonstrate peacefully at St. Peter’s Fields near Manchester. The local government authorities allowed them to do so. But once they had gathered, those authorities, the magistrates, lost their nerve seeing such a mass of protesters, even if they were peaceful. They ordered police to charge on horses into the crowd to force it to disperse; the police also used sabres freely. The resulting stampede killed eleven demonstrators (including two women); hundreds of men and over a hundred women were injured. Afterwards, the government in London praised the magistrates for that action without even investigating whether it was justified. This episode, of deadly force used on peaceful demonstrators, convinced many workers that they were living in a state of war with their government. It also shocked many bourgeois, who were disgusted with the conservative (Tory) government and determined to find new solutions to the “Social Problem” of workers’ lives under industrialization.

1826

1829-1835

1832-1844

1846-1848

Between 1838 and 1848, Chartism, a workers’ movement calling for democratization, swept England. In 1832, the British Reform Bill expanded the number of men who were able to vote. Everyone who paid ten pounds in taxes was eligible to vote. This enfranchised more of the middle classes in towns, but it excluded workers. The Chartists wanted to expand that suffrage further, and they held mass meetings and collected signatures on petitions. Their “6 Points” of “The People’s Charter” were:

--universal male suffrage

--annual meetings of Parliaments (instead of less frequent convenings)

--salary for members of Parliament (so that men who were not independently wealthy could run)

--vote by secret ballot

--equal electoral districts, to account for population shifts caused by industrial revolution

--abolition of property qualifications for members of parliament

You will recognize these as some basic liberal demands--but they nevertheless seemed very radical to Britain’s bourgeoisie. The Chartists failed. It took until the First World War to gain these demands.