

History - Lesson 4 of 4

Popular protest, 1850-1900

Enquiry: How far did working conditions improve during the nineteenth century?

Mr Olivey



Popular politics and popular protest

After the Chartists' petitions were rejected in 1839, 1842 and 1848, working-class people remained unable to vote for **MPs**. It would not be until 1884 that most ordinary working-class men would be given the vote; women did not gain the right to vote until 1919. Yet there was more to being involved in politics than 'just' voting for an MP. The events that took place in Lancashire between 1862-66 are an example of how working conditions and political action overlapped in the nineteenth century.



The Lancashire Cotton Famine (1862-66)

By 1860, Manchester was a huge city that had grown rapidly in the previous hundred years. Thousands of people had **immigrated** from the surrounding countryside; they were pulled in to work in the city's **cotton mills**. Yet, when a Civil War broke out in the USA in 1861 - between the **abolitionist** Northern States and the slave-holding confederate Southern States - the flow of raw cotton into Manchester was disrupted. Despite the terrible unemployment and poverty that this 'Cotton Famine' caused, Manchester's workers agreed to support the anti-slavery cause of the Northern States.



The Matchgirls Strike (1888)

In 1888, women and girls who worked for the Bryant and May match factory in London went on **strike**. They demanded better pay, fairer hours and safer working conditions. In the nineteenth century a substance called white phosphorus was used to manufacture matches; it was toxic and caused a condition called 'phossy jaw'. The strike ended after a few months when the owners of the factory agreed to improve working conditions for the Matchgirls. This strike was one example of the 'labour movement' that also saw **trade unions** grow in the late nineteenth-century.



Glossary

MPs - Members of Parliament who are elected to make laws.

Immigrated - moving from one place to another.

Cotton mills - places where cotton fabric was made from raw cotton fibers.

Abolitionist - people who supported the abolition of slavery.

Strike - refusing to work until your demands are met.

Trade union - where workers band together to campaign for better pay and working conditions.



Comprehension Questions

1. When were working-class people given the vote?
2. What caused the Lancashire Cotton Famine?
3. Why did the Matchgirls go on strike in 1888?

