



How did the Chartists try to win the vote?

The voting system had been changed but working men still could not vote in elections. They were very disappointed. They had worked with the middle classes to change the old system but now felt they had been let down. Their struggle for the right to vote went on.

What was Chartism?

In 1836 a group of London working men drew up a Charter with six political demands.

▼ **SOURCE 1** *The Charter.*

The Six Points OF THE PEOPLE'S

CHARTER.

1. A VOTE for every man twenty-one years of age, of sound mind, and not undergoing punishment for crime.
2. THE BALLOT.—To protect the elector in the exercise of his vote.
3. NO PROPRYTY QUALIFICATION for Members of Parliament—thus enabling the constituencies to return the man of their choice, be he rich or poor.
4. PAYMENT OF MEMBERS, thus enabling an honest tradesman, working man, or other person, to serve a constituency, when taken from his business to attend to the interests of the country.
5. EQUAL CONSTITUENCIES, securing the same amount of representation for the same number of electors, instead of allowing small constituencies to swamp the votes of large ones.
6. ANNUAL PARLIAMENTS, thus presenting the most effectual check to bribery and intimidation, since through a constituency might be bought once in seven years (even with the ballot), no purse could buy a constituency (under a system of universal suffrage) in each ensuing twelvemonth; and since members, when elected for a year only, would not be able to defy and betray their constituents as now.

ACTIVITY 1

- 1 Summarise each demand in one sentence.
- 2 How was each of the six points in the Charter meant to make the voting system fairer?

i.e. a secret ballot

i.e. equal sized constituencies

Peaceful protest or violent action?

There were two main groups of protesters. Both groups wanted the six points of the Charter but they went about getting them in different ways.

Moral force



William Lovett was the leader of the 'Moral Force' Chartists. They believed that the way to get the government to agree to the Charter was to show them that Chartists were worthy of the vote. They held meetings, wrote letters to persuade the government, set up schools to help people learn to read and write and encouraged Chartists not to drink, in order to show that they were worthy of the vote.

SOURCE 2 *William Lovett writing in 1839.*
Let us, Friends, unite together the honest, moral, hard-working and thinking members of society. Let us obtain a library of books. Let us publish our views, so that we create a moral, thinking, energetic force in politics.

Physical force



Feargus O'Connor on the other hand was prepared to use force to get the government to introduce the six points of the Charter. He was leader of the 'Physical Force' Chartists. He held large meetings and made passionate speeches urging Chartists to fight for what was their right. A lot of the language he used in his speeches was violent.

ACTIVITY 2

- 1 On pages 206–207 we tell the story of the Chartist movement. Use this information to fill out a new row for your table: The Chartists.
- 2 Why do you think the Chartists were split over how to win the vote?
- 3 Why do you think the government did not agree to the changes the Chartists wanted?

SOURCE 3 *One of Feargus O'Connor's closest allies, George Harney, wrote in the Chartist newspaper The Northern Star, February 1839.*
We will make our country one vast howling wilderness of desolation and destruction rather than the tyrants shall carry out their infernal system. Believe me, there is no argument like the sword, and the musket is unanswerable.

The story of Chartism

7 1842 Mills back at work
Strikers arrested by troops
Prison for those who will not go back to work

5 1842 Second Chartist petition rejected
3 million people sign new Chartist petition
Petition rejected again – 287 votes to 49

8 1848 Fears of revolution
Third Chartist petition to go to Parliament – 5.7 million signatures
Commons rejects petition by 222 votes to 17

3 1839 Chartist petition rejected
House of Commons rejects petition by 235 votes to 46
MP says 'we cannot ever give the vote to the lower classes'

1 May 1839 The People's Charter
1.2 million sign petition supporting the Charter
Meetings held up and down the country

2 July 1839 Chartist riot in Birmingham
Police and soldiers clash with crowd
6000 troops sent to the North

4 1839 Rebellion in Newport
7000 miners and ironworkers march on Newport
Soldiers kill twenty
Leaders to be transported

6 1842 Strikes and more strikes
50,000 on strike in Lancashire
Chartists say 'No work until we have the Charter'

1848 – the Chartist revolution?

The government was worried stiff. There had already been revolutions that year in Paris, Baden, Vienna, Berlin, Dresden, Budapest, Warsaw, Milan, Venice, Bologna and elsewhere. Would London be next? Would the mass of people on Kennington Common (see Source 4) storm Parliament and seize power? The Commander in Chief of the British Army, the 79-year-old Duke of Wellington, feared the worst. How do we know?

- He sent Queen Victoria for safety to her palace on the Isle of Wight!
- He banned the Chartist procession from going into the centre of London (which they had no intention of doing).
- Cannon were placed on London's bridges in case the Chartists tried to attack Parliament.
- Key buildings – the Bank of England, the Post Office and the Guildhall – were barricaded.
- 85,000 special constables were appointed.
- And just in case, there were 4000 police and 8000 soldiers standing by!

ACTIVITY
Write some headlines for various newspapers for 11 April 1848. Include some that are meant to be read by important government officials and some that are read by working men. What will be their angle on the meeting?



In fact, the great Chartist demonstration was a peaceful affair. Thousands of people gathered to hear speeches. The event ended in pouring rain. A huge petition was carried to Parliament in a series of horse-drawn coaches, then everybody went home. Parliament overwhelmingly rejected the petition.

▲ **SOURCE 4**
On 10 April 1848 thousands of Chartists met on Kennington Common, London.