

History - Lesson 3 of 4

Popular protest, 1800-1850

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

Mr Olivey



Food riots (1700s)

In the eighteenth century, food riots were one of the ways that ordinary people tried to improve their lives. People in small towns and villages did not want to overthrow or replace the King or politicians. They did, however, want to ensure that they could buy wheat to make bread for a fair price.

Food riots were not random acts of violence. They were actually carefully-**choreographed** events full of **symbolism** that were used to **communicate** with millers and grain sellers. The historian E.P. Thompson argued that these riots were controlled by the 'moral economy of the crowd'.



Luddism (1811)

Britain was transformed by the Industrial Revolution and many small **rural** communities died out. With the disappearance of these communities, food riots stopped happening. The idea, however, that workers should be treated fairly by wealthy elites survived. The Luddites were angry that their jobs were being replaced by more efficient stocking frames. They attacked factories that used the more efficient spinning frames and left the older frames alone. In response, the Parliament passed the Frame Breaking Bill in 1812, which sentenced anyone found guilty of frame breaking to death.



Captain Swing (1830)

By the 1830s, **mechanisation** and new threshing machines led to many agricultural labourers losing their jobs. Poverty and unemployment became common in the English countryside.

Eventually, unemployed farm labourers decided to fight back against the machines that had ruined their lives. Rioters, pretending to be a fictional character called Captain Swing, smashed up threshing machines and burnt down hay ricks. They did not want to beg or steal from their masters. These protestors simply wanted to **preserve** their old way of life and work.



Chartism (1838-1848)

Unlike food rioters, or the Luddites, or the Swing rioters, the Chartists had political (as opposed to purely **economic**) aims. Chartists wanted votes for all men and for working-class people to become MPs. Chartists were, however, mainly working-class. Many wanted to change politics to improve their working and living conditions. Unlike earlier protests, Chartism was a national movement. Its leaders used railways to speak across the country.



Glossary

Choreographed - Planning something (often a dance) very carefully.

Symbolism - When something is used as a symbol to represent something else.

Communicate - Saying something (with words, pictures or actions).

Rural - In the countryside.

Mechanisation - Using a machine to do a job that people used to do.

Preserve - Keep something alive and protect it from threats.

Economic - related to money, jobs and the economy.

Rituals - A series of actions performed in a certain, agreed order.



Comprehension Questions

1. What did eighteenth-century food rioters want to achieve?
2. What did the Luddites want to achieve?
3. What did the Swing Rioters want to achieve?
4. What did the Chartists want to achieve?
5. How similar were the Chartists to earlier forms of popular protest?

