

Power and the People, 1215-2015



Content

This booklet contains an overview of the 4 topics. This is a minimum amount of information you need to know. Use this alongside your exercise book when you revise.

Middle Ages, 1215-1500

The decline of the Feudal System

A: John I and Magna Carta, 1215:

Causes

King John was not a successful king. He had lost all the English lands in France (including Normandy in 1204), had introduced a tax called scutage (that allowed Barons to skip military service in return for paying a tax to John) and had fallen out with the Pope over the appointment of Stephen Langton as Archbishop of Canterbury. John believed he ought to be able to choose who was Archbishop in England. John also had 'favourites' rather than listening to the advice of all his Barons.

Main Events

Because of his obvious weaknesses, the Barons decided to rebel against John in 1215. John agreed to the terms of Magna Carta: that the King should not be able to interfere in religion, that taxes need to be agreed to by the Barons and that all people had the right to a fair trial. However, in 1216 John raised an army to fight back against the Barons. The Barons gained support from the King of Scotland and King of France. When John died in 1216, his 9 year old son Henry became King, and the Barons ran the country for him.

Significance & Impact

The main impact of the Magna Carta was that it established the idea that the King could not act, without the agreement of his Barons, or believe (too strongly) in his 'divine right' to rule. Clause 1 of the Magna Carta stopped the king interfering with the Church, and clause 12 stated the king couldn't create a new tax without the agreement of the country (i.e the Barons!). In the future, other 'charters' would be issued by rebellious groups such as the Chartists in the 1800s. This rebellion is also significant, and the document the barons created, is often seen as the starting point for our journey towards democracy, fairness and reducing the power of kings.

B: Simon de Montfort's rebellion, 1264-65:

Causes

John I's son, Henry, became King in 1225. Henry was always in financial difficulties, he had lost battles & land in France in 1230 and 1242. He also preferred (like John had) 'personal rule' where he would seek the advice of his favourites, rather than all the Barons. This meant people felt he was abusing his power, and excluding his major barons from decision making.

Main Events

By 1258 the Barons had had enough of Henry and forced him to sign the Provisions of Oxford. This stated that Henry had to continue the rules of Magna Carta. However, by 1264 Henry was still not a successful King, and Simon de Montfort (Earl of Leicester) decided to rise in rebellion against Henry. Simon had been a successful military leader in France. He had also been a friend of Henry's but had fallen out with him when Henry accused Simon of being corrupt when in charge of Gascony (an area in France). Simon defeated Henry at the Battle of Lewes in 1264 and became 'leader of England' (he did not become 'King' of England). In order to gain more support, Simon invited Knights to Parliament to discuss their problems.

Significance & Impact

This was the first time English people (other than Barons) had been invited to discuss the country and has led to Simon being described as the 'father of parliamentary democracy' in England. This event led to the creation of the 'commons' in Parliament, and then laid the foundations of the House of Commons today, where our MPs sit to create laws. However, by 1265 Henry and Edward (Henry's son) had an army of 18,000 and were able to defeat Simon at the Battle of Evesham. But, significantly, the introduction of knights into Parliament could not be reversed, and power continued to slowly spread to different classes.

C: Peasants' Revolt, 1381:

Causes

From 1348-49 the Black Death had killed 50% of the population in England, which were mainly peasants who worked on the land for rich Barons and landowners. The remaining peasants began to realise that they could demand more wages, as there was a demand for peasants to work on the land: Barons would not do this themselves! In 1377 and 1379 Richard II had ordered a poll tax (a tax for all of the population) to provide money for the ongoing war with France.

Main Events

The peasants had had enough. Led by Wat Tyler they marched on London, through the south west of England, smashing up rich landowners' properties on their way. When they reached London they demanded to speak to Richard, to demand that the poll tax be stopped and that wages for labourers (people who worked in manual jobs) be increased. Richard II went out to meet the rebels. He managed to persuade them to leave London and accepted their demands. However, when the peasants left London, Richard ordered the execution of Wat Tyler and the other rebel leaders. He also refused to stop the poll tax or increase wages for labourers.

Significance & Impact

Although unsuccessful, the Peasants' Revolt was incredibly significant as it was the first time there was a rebellion against the king by the English people. The ideas given to them by John Ball would lead them to question the rules that they were forced to follow eg the sumptuary laws restricting clothing, and encouraged the people to be more confident in standing up for their rights. Also, this event showed that taxes must be fair. The Poll Tax was cancelled and was only brought back (and then cancelled after protests) in the 1980s by Margaret Thatcher.

Early Modern, 1500-1800

The end of the Divine Right of Kings

A: Pilgrimage of Grace, 1536:

Causes

By 1536 Henry VIII had established England's religious 'break with Rome' meaning that Catholicism was no longer the state religion of England (the main religion for everyone). This was because his first wife, Catherine of Aragon, had failed to provide him with a son, and so in order to divorce Catherine and marry Anne Boleyn (which the Pope would not allow) he needed to 'break with Rome'. This, along with Thomas Cromwell's (who was Henry's chief minister) closure of the monasteries led to rebellion in the north of England. Many of the population in the north worked in monasteries, and people were suspicious of the 'reform' (change) of the English church that was happening in London and the south of England.

Main Events

The first rebellion began in Lincoln but was quickly stopped when Henry sent an army north. However, led by Robert Aske, a lawyer from Lincoln, an army of 30,000 northerners was created, and camped out in York. The army swore an oath to their 'Pilgrimage' – to save the Catholic Church in England. Henry was worried about the rebellion and sent the Duke of Norfolk to 'deal' with the rebels. However, the Duke realised that the rebel army was too strong, and had to agree to their demands: that no more monasteries would be closed in the north and that religious change (away from Catholicism) would slow down. Henry, reluctantly, also had to agree and the rebel army went back to their homes. However, when another rebellion broke out in January 1537 Henry used it as an opportunity to round up the leaders of Pilgrimage, including Robert Aske, and have them executed. The Pilgrimage had failed. There were no more major rebellions against Henry VIII.

Significance & Impact

Parliament increased its power as a result of this rebellion and the Break with Rome as it was given the power to vote and decide the country's religion. As a result, this meant future religious changes would have to go through Parliament, the representatives of the people, taking more power away from kings. In this event, the king also brought more power into England, by removing England from the laws of the Catholic church, decided by the pope in Rome. Furthermore, this event also showed that religious change could be a cause of rebellion, setting the stage for the Civil War.

B: English Civil War, 1642-1649:

Causes

The English Civil War happened primarily because of the weaknesses of Charles I as King of England. Charles believed in his own 'divine right' to rule and, from 1629-1640, ruled England without Parliament. He ordered the ship money tax (a tax to pay for the upkeep of the Navy) to be paid across the country; many refused to pay and were sent straight to prison.

Main Events

Eventually, because of his unwillingness to use Parliament to help him rule, civil war broke out in 1642. Those supporting the King became known as Cavaliers; those supporting Parliament became known as the Parliamentarians. The turning point in the war came in 1645 when Oliver Cromwell (leader of the Parliamentarians) created the New Model Army. The New Model Army was made up of ex-army veterans, and was supremely well organised. In 1645, Charles was captured and held prisoner by Cromwell. Charles was tried by a court and found guilty of 'putting his own interests above those of his country.'

Charles was executed in 1649: the only English King to be executed. From 1649-1660, England was a Republic (a country without a monarchy) led by Oliver Cromwell, who gave himself the title of 'Lord Protector'. Cromwell was offered the title of 'King of England' in 1657, but refused it. Cromwell was a 'puritan' (a very strict Christian) and many of his changes in England became very unpopular: banning Christmas, closing theatres and stopping women wearing make-up. By 1660, following his death, Cromwell had become so unpopular that it was decided to restore (bring back) the monarchy, and Charles II (Charles I's son) became the new King of England.

Significance & Impact

The main significance of the English Civil War is that it ended the idea that Kings could rule by their 'divine right' – they needed to ensure they had the support of Parliament in their ideas. This event was also significant as it gave Parliament, the representatives of the people, far more power than they had ever had before. This event also created radical groups like the Levellers and the Diggers who wanted to share political power with ordinary people. The ideas of the levellers and diggers would appear again in the 19th century reform movements like the Chartists.

C: American Revolution, 1776-1781

Causes

The American Revolution broke out in 1776 when the American colonists decided they no longer wanted to be ruled by the British government. Throughout the 1600s the British had colonised (taken over areas of) America. British people became 'colonists' – people who moved from Britain to settle in America. These people adopted their own cultures, and began to desire their own independence from British rule. During the 1770s the British government had forced the American colonists to pay taxes eg Stamp Tax to support war with France. This had annoyed the colonists as they had no representation in the British parliament, in London. Although being on the other side of the world, they were unable to make their own decisions on how their country should be run.



Main Events

In 1776 the colonists announced the Declaration of Independence (their claim that they were now independent from British rule) which started the British. Luckily for the American colonists, they were supported by France who gave them weapons and ships to help them in the war against the British army and navy. By 1781, the American colonists and French army had defeated the British.

Significance & Impact

This was the first time that a colony had broken away from its ruling country; America established themselves as a constitutional democracy (a country with a clear set of rules and fairer elections). Furthermore, American people were given a 'Bill of Rights' to protect them. The changes that took place in America would influence people in Britain to call for reforms to make Britain fairer and would drive the calls for voting reform and more freedom for workers in the 19th Century.

19th century

The growth of rights & freedom

A: Voting Reform & the 1832 Great Reform Act

Issue

Very few people could vote in the early 1800s, except for rich landowners. MPs were also not paid, and so only rich people could become. Rotten boroughs also existed, which were areas where not many people lived, that still elected an MP. The Peterloo Massacre took place in Manchester in 1819; 100,000 people had joined to watch the famous orator Henry Hunt speak in favour of universal suffrage (the right for all to vote). However, the government responded by sending in the army, leading to the death of 11 people. However, following more riots in Bristol, Nottingham and Derby, people began to protest against this system. This event saw people campaigning for voting equality, though at this stage it was just for men.

Action

The government realised the need for change, and the Great Reform Act was passed in 1832 by Lord Grey. This was the first major reform of the voting system in Britain, which widened the franchise (right to vote) to small landowners and shopkeepers; though in reality it only increased the electorate from 500,000 to 800,000. This showed there was still a long way to go in making voting fairer in the UK, but it did show that the country was starting to make steps towards becoming more democratic.

Impact & Significance

The Great Reform Act abolished tiny districts, gave representation to cities, gave the vote to shopkeepers and householders who paid a yearly rent of £10. The Act introduced the first explicit ban to women voting by defining a voter as a male person. The Act gave 1/5 of all adult males the vote which was a significant change, but many people across the country did not believe the act went far enough. Working class males and all females were unable to vote. Events such as the Peterloo Massacre in 1819 also showed that violence from the government was no longer effective in limiting calls for reform.

B: The Chartists

Issue

The Chartists were a social movement, pressurising for political change; they believed that the 1832 Reform Act had not gone far enough and demanded more radical changes: a vote for all men over 21, secret voting, payments for MPs, no property qualifications for MPs and annual Parliaments (a vote for a new government every year).

Action

The Chartists made this list of demands in their 'Peoples' Charter' in 1838 – a bit like Magna Carta, which meant 'Great Charter.' The Chartists spread their message widely through the use of newspapers such as the Northern Star and through petitions, which were sent to the government, demanding change. Though these petitions gained millions of votes, they were all rejected by Parliament. The main problem with the Chartist movement was that it was divided within; some (including their leader Feargus O'Connor) believed in using violence to achieve their aims, whereas others (such as William Lovett) favoured persuasion and protest. In the mid-1850s there was an economic upturn in Britain, and the popularity of the Chartists decreased.

Impact & Significance

Though none of their aims were achieved in their lifetime, annual Parliaments is the only aim that has not yet been introduced in Britain. This event showed that people were willing to protest to push forward their rights. This is an early example of groups taking advantage of new communication methods such as newspapers and leaflets (Northern Star) which would influence later groups like the suffragists and suffragettes.

C: Anti-Slavery movement

Issue

The wealth of Britain was dependent on the slave trade during the 1700s – this was the capturing and selling of Africans to the West Indies and America, to work (as slaves) in the production of sugar, tobacco and cotton, before being sold to Britain.

Action

By the late 1700s, the Anti-Slavery movement was starting to gain momentum; in 1787 a petition with 100,000 names (20% of the adult population) was presented to Parliament. Thomas Clarkson, a student at Cambridge University wrote pamphlets against the slave trade; poems and books were also written against the slave trade – these people became known as the 'Abolitionists.' Groups of people refused to buy products from shops that had imported their goods from the West Indies or America, this is an economic method of achieving change called 'boycotting'. The role of religious groups such as Anglicans in calling for change also showed that moral issues, and treating all humans equally, would become important in the 19th and 20th centuries.

Impact & Significance

Eventually, in part due to this pressure from the Abolitionists, the slave trade was abandoned in 1833. This event is significant as it showed the start of a desire for social and legal equality, and an awareness of the evils of racism. It helped set the course for the drive for equality in the 20th Century. It is also an example of campaigning groups caring about the rights of others outside of the United Kingdom. The leaflets and other methods demonstrated the importance of winning the moral argument against slavery, and trying to influence public opinion to achieve change.

D: Anti-Corn Law League

Issue

The Corn Laws were passed in 1815 by the British government; they stated that foreign corn (which was much cheaper) could not be imported into Britain, meaning that the population would have to buy British based corn – which was much more expensive! This showed the government had sided with the rich landowners in Britain, rather than the poorer factory workers who had moved to the towns. This event would show a campaign for economic equality, and would push the idea that it was the government's job to actively improve the lives of its people.

Action

The first Anti-Corn Law association was set up in Nottingham in 1833; motivated by the abolition of slavery, they discussed methods of how to pressurise the government into repealing (stopping) the Corn Laws. John Bright became an influential figure in the movement, and soon began to attract crowds of 5000 to hear him speak on the issue of the Corn Laws. Bright proposed the theory of 'free trade' to allow for prices of corn to become more competitive, and therefore cheaper for factory workers.

Impact & Significance

Eventually, the Corn Laws were repealed in 1846, by the Conservative politician Robert Peel. It showed the government would have to start to take care of the lives of its people, and would have to get involved in the economy in order to make things fairer, this is seen in the push to improve the lives of children and working conditions more generally.

E: Child Labour Reforms

Issue

Lord Shaftesbury was one of the greatest reformers (men who wanted to change society) in the 19th century. He was particularly concerned with improving the lives of women and children who were forced to work in Britain at this time, and they had very few protections to help keep them safe.



Action

He became an MP in 1826. In 1833 he began to lead to call for reform in the factories – he introduced the Ten Hours Bill which reduced the amount of hours that children could work in mines. In 1842, he created the Mines and Collieries Act that banned women and children from working in mines. He believed strongly in education for all children and supported Ragged Schools – these were schools set up to support children too poor to attend normal school and provide them with food.

Impact & Significance

This event shows how society was gradually beginning to take on a more caring role, and also demonstrated that the government was starting to limit the power of the free market in order to ensure working conditions were safe. This era also saw the rise of other reformers such as Octavia Hill who looked after people's living conditions. These changes signalled that the government would take a far greater role in people's lives, as can be seen with the introduction of things like the NHS in the 1900s.

F: Tolpuddle Martyrs:

Issue



In 1800 the government introduced the Combinations Act, which prevented groups (combinations) or workers joining together to pressurise for better pay or working conditions.

Action

In 1834 a group of six agricultural workers in Tolpuddle (a village in Dorset) formed to make a union – their pay had recently been reduced from 10 shillings a week to 7. Although the Combinations Act had been repealed (and unions were now legal) the local landowner found out about their meetings, and they were arrested. The workers were sentenced to seven years transportation – this would mean working in Australia for seven years! There was an immediate outcry against the sentence – 200,000 people met and marched to London to protest against the decision. In 1837, the six men were eventually released and allowed home to Dorset.

Impact & Significance

The story of the Tolpuddle Martyrs provided inspiration for future groups of workers to band together, to fight for a common goal. The fact that the public protested against this, with 200,000 people marching to call for their freedom, showed that the public would no longer tolerate abuse of power by the government.

G: Trade Unions and the Labour Party

Issue

Trade Unions became more popular throughout the 1860s, as a consequence of the difficult working conditions and low wages that most factory owners experienced. During the 1870s and 1880s a clear working-class culture was starting to appear, based around working men's clubs and sporting groups – this made it easier for further unions to form, as workers were already starting to group together in a more social way.

Action

Workers began to strike – the most successful strike came in 1889 when the London Dock workers refused to work from August-September; eventually, the employers agreed to most of the workers' demands. Other strikers such as the Matchstick girls in 1888, the first successful female strikers, demonstrated how the working classes could achieve change against their bosses if they worked together.

Impact & Significance

Between 1889-1892 union membership doubled, so the workign classes were increasing in their power. In **1893 the Labour Party** was created – the first political party set up with the purpose of representing working people. In time, the Liberal Party was replaced by the Labour Party, leaving two dominant political parties in Britain: the Conservatives (Tories) and Labour. The growth of trade unions would encourage major future events like the General Strike, in 1926.

20th century

The battle for equality and fairness

A: Women's Rights:

Issue

At the turn of the twentieth women certainly had fewer rights than men: the most important disadvantage was that women could not vote and therefore not become MPs. Women were beginning to become teachers and doctors and yet they were still not allowed the vote.

Action

Groups such as the Suffragettes and Suffragists began to pressurise the government to change the voting system. The Suffragettes were led by Emmeline Pankhurst and believed in using violent methods to gain publicity for their cause: they attacked MPs and policemen, chained themselves to public buildings and organised mass demonstrations, which often ended violently. The Suffragists were led by Millicent Fawcett and believed in peaceful methods: writing letters to MPs, petitions and peaceful speeches. When WW1 broke out women dropped their campaign and became heavily involved in the war effort: they worked in munitions factories making weapons, as nurses in France (where the war was) and working on the land to help produce food.

Impact & Significance

Eventually, when the war ended in 1918, women were rewarded for their work: all women over 30 were given the vote. This began a drive for broader equality in society, and represented the start of feminism, which aimed to gain women equal political power and equal treatment to men. This event also shows that during the 20th Century, just like through this course, if people felt power was unequal in society, they would be willing to protest in order to achieve change.

B: The 1926 General Strike:

Issue

The name 'General' is given to the 1926 strike as all members of the 'Triple Alliance' (coal, railway and transport workers) decided to strike together at the same time. After WW1 (1914-1918) there was an economic slump – many men lost their jobs or had their wages reduced. The workers had been inspired by the growth in trade union power in the early 20th century, so decided to go on strike to protect their wages and working conditions.

Action

This eventually led to the General Strike in 1926. Although the strike did begin peacefully things did become violent and violent clashes broke out between striking workers and the police. The TUC (Trade Union Congress – which was in charge of all unions) began to worry about the strike becoming violent, they felt as though they were losing control of the situation. Therefore, the TUC decided to do a deal with the government and mine owners to get the strikers back to work; the strike ended on May 13th.

Impact & Significance

Many of the leaders of the strike were ‘blacklisted’ (not employed by businesses) and struggled to find work. The government response, led by Winston Churchill, showed that an organised government could withstand a national strike, so it weakened the power of the trade unions which had grown over the previous 100 years. The strike showed how strong the unions were in the 1920s, but the power of unions went up and down, until it peaked in the 1980s.

C: Margaret Thatcher Vs the Unions, 1984/5:

Issue

After WW2 the relationship between the government and unions changed again; the Labour Party became the party that represented unions’ rights. The unions became so powerful that they were able to go on strike and secure better pay throughout the 1960s and 70s, until Margaret Thatcher became the first female Prime Minister in 1979. Thatcher was a Conservative, and a radical opponent of the unions; she believed that the unions had become too powerful and in 1984/5 ‘went to war’ with the miners.

Action

The 1984/5 miners’ strike was in response to Thatcher’s proposed closure of working mines, mainly in the north of England. Similar to 1926, the strike became violent and divided families: those who believe in the strike and those who believed that Thatcher’s plans could not be stopped. Arthur Scargill was the leader of the NUM (National Union of Miners) who viewed Thatcher as the enemy of working class people; he regularly argued with Thatcher over the closure of mines.

Impact & Significance

Eventually, the strikers were defeated, and the miners returned to work. The major consequence of the defeat of the miners was the rise of unemployment in northern towns (such as Barnsley) that had been ex ‘pit towns’. This represented a decline in the power of workers and showed the government could control Trade Unions if they needed to.

D: The Windrush Generation and minority rights:

Issue

Britain has always been an island that had experienced immigration and migration: all British people are descended from people who did not originate in Britain, such as the Vikings, Saxons or Normans. In 1948, the first generation of Afro-Caribbean's arrived in Britain, bringing with them their own unique culture. Afro-Caribbean's had been heavily involved in supporting Britain in the war effort (WW2 lasted from 1939-45), and so it was seen by many as the duty of Britain to welcome these new migrants to the country.



Action

Many of these migrants settled in areas of London such as Hackney or Notting Hill (where the carnival is still held today). The arrival of the Windrush generation marked the start of mass immigration in the second half of the twentieth century that has shaped Britain to this day. There were some problems faced by the new arrivals, as shown by the Notting Hill Riots in 1958, the Brixton Riots of 1981. Also, despite the government's efforts to improve race relations, such as through the 1965 Race Relations Act, a minority of political figures still opposed racial equality, such as Enoch Powell, who wrongly predicted 'rivers of blood' if equality laws were brought in.

Impact & Significance

Immigration has since become a political issue and has been a major factor in government laws passed, such as the 2010 Equality Act, which prevents companies from discriminating against individuals based on their race, gender, sexual orientation or religion. People continue to migrate to and from Britain, from across the world. These changes are significant as the slow pace of change reflects the many battles for equality, and fair treatment in Britain throughout this course.