

Key dates in the struggle for rights in Britain

1791

Tom Paine's book the *Rights of Man* is published and eventually sells 200,000 copies. It calls for political equality and representative government and denounces hereditary privilege and monarchy.

1792

Paine is prosecuted for sedition and flees to France, where he is elected a member of the National Convention. Convention meets in Edinburgh to campaign for electoral reform and the leaders are arrested and jailed/transported.

1793

Britain declares war on revolutionary France

1794

Habeas corpus suspended – for nine years

1795

150,000 gather in Islington in October to demand political reform. The King's coach is attacked a few days later as he travels in state to open Parliament.

1795

Two Acts passed, which made it a treasonable offence to incite hatred of the government, constitution or monarch. All public meetings need a government licence.

1797

Mutiny of the British fleet at Spithead. The taking of an oath is made illegal.

1799-1800

Combination Acts illegalise trade unions.

1816

Radicals demand reform. Habeas corpus suspended again.

1817

Gagging Act – all political meetings forbidden except by permission of magistrates. March of Blanketeers of starving Manchester handloomers to London. Attacked and dispersed.

1819

Peterloo Massacre. Mass assembly of workers demanding political reform attacked at St Peter's field, Manchester. 11 are killed.

1819

The Six Acts introduce heavy tax on newspapers, summary conviction for political offences and searches without a warrant.

1823

Master and Servant Act gives employers remedies for breach of contract by workers. In force until 1875.

1832

First Reform Act enfranchises rising capitalist class but excludes workers.

1833

Meeting of Grand Consolidated Trade Union, the first all-union gathering in history

1834

Tolpuddle agricultural workers are sentenced to transportation for forming a union
New Poor Law introduces the workhouse.

1837

Northern Star, the voice of the Chartist movement, begins to appear.

1838

Chartist movement is formed around the Six Demands. A petition calling for the vote and other demands launched.

1839

General Convention of the Industrious Classes meets in London and later moves to Birmingham, where riots take place.
Commons rejects first National Petition.
Newport Rising by revolutionary wing of the Chartists.

1840

Abortive plans for insurrection in Bradford and Sheffield.
Trials of arrested Chartists.
National Charter Association is set up, viewed as first working class party.

1842

Chartist Convention meets in London.
Commons rejects second petition.
Massive strike wave in northern industrial areas.

1843

Feargus O'Connor and other Chartist leaders tried in Lancaster

1847

Ten Hours Factory Act is passed.
O'Connor victorious in Nottingham at general election.

1848

Revolution in France
Communist Manifesto published in London (in German)
Chartist Convention meets in London.
Kennington Common mass meeting for Chartism.
Commons rejects third petition.

National Assembly meets.
Chartist demonstrations and arrests.

1867

Second Reform Act grants the vote to working class men in towns.

1875

Trade unions finally win legal immunity

1884

Votes for rural workers

1900

Formation of Labour Party

1906

First Labour MPs elected to Commons.

1918

Votes for women over 21

1924

First Labour government take office.

1929

Votes for women over 30

1945

First majority Labour government

1970

Voting age lowered to 18

1979-1997

Trade unions lose many of their rights