



Forced feeding of English suffragist, 1912

WITNESS HISTORY AUDIO

No Surrender

Lady Constance Lytton had been arrested for taking part in a women's suffrage protest. Once arrested, she refused to eat. Her hunger strike, she vowed, would go on until the British government granted the vote to women. Lytton later recalled:

“I was visited again by the Senior Medical Officer, who asked me how long I had been without food. I said I had eaten . . . on Friday at about midnight. He said, ‘Oh, then, this is the fourth day; that is too long, I shall feed you, I must feed you at once.’”


—Constance Lytton, *Prisons and Prisoners*

In the end, the doctor force-fed Lytton through a tube. Yet the painful ordeal failed to weaken her resolve. “No surrender,” she whispered. “No surrender.”

Focus Question What social and economic reforms were passed by the British Parliament during the 1800s and early 1900s?

Social and Economic Reform in Britain

Objectives

- Identify the social and economic reforms benefiting British workers and others. 
- Describe how British women worked to win the right to vote.
- Understand the causes of conflict between the British and the Irish nationalists.

Terms, People, and Places

free trade penal colony
 repeal absentee landlord
 abolition movement home rule
 capital offense

Note Taking

Reading Skill: Categorize Complete a chart like this one listing the reforms in Britain during the 1800s and early 1900s.

| Reforms in Britain | | |
|--------------------|------------------|---------------------|
| Economic • • | Social • • | Political • • |

Lytton's 1910 hunger strike was part of the long struggle for women's suffrage in Britain. Suffragists were not the only people to fight for change. Between 1815 and 1914, Parliament responded to widespread discontent with a series of social and economic reforms. At the same time, the question of British control over Ireland was becoming a dominant and divisive political issue.

A Series of Reforms

During the early and mid-1800s, Parliament passed a wide variety of important new laws. One of the most controversial measures involved the issue of **free trade**, or trade between countries without quotas, tariffs, or other restrictions.

Free Trade and the Corn Laws In the early 1800s, Britain, like other European nations, taxed foreign imports in order to protect local economies. But supporters of free trade demanded an end to such protective tariffs. Free traders, usually middle-class business leaders, agreed with Adam Smith that a policy of *laissez faire* would increase prosperity for all. If tariffs were abolished, merchants everywhere would have larger markets in which to sell their goods, and consumers would benefit from open competition.

Some British tariffs were repealed in the 1820s. However, fierce debate erupted over the Corn Laws, which imposed high tariffs on imported grain. (In Britain, “corn” refers to all cereal grains, such



as wheat, barley, and oats.) Farmers and wealthy landowners supported the Corn Laws because they kept the price of British grain high. Free traders, however, wanted Parliament to **repeal**, or cancel, the Corn Laws. They argued that repeal of these laws would lower the price of grain, make bread cheaper for workers, and open up trade in general.


Parliament finally repealed the Corn Laws in 1846, after widespread crop failures swept many parts of Europe. Liberals hailed the repeal as a victory for free trade and laissez-faire capitalism. However, in the late 1800s, economic hard times led Britain and other European countries to impose protective tariffs on many goods again.

Campaign Against Slavery During the 1700s, Enlightenment thinkers had turned the spotlight on the evils of the slave trade. At the time, British ships were carrying more Africans to the Americas than any other European country. Under pressure from middle-class reformers in Britain, France, and the United States, the **abolition movement**, or the campaign against slavery and the slave trade, slowly took off. In 1807, Britain became the first European power to abolish the slave trade.

Banning the slave trade did not end slavery. Although the Congress of Vienna had condemned slavery, it had taken no action. In Britain, liberals preached the immorality of slavery. Finally, in 1833, Parliament passed a law banning slavery in all British colonies.

Crime and Punishment Other reforms were aimed at the criminal justice system. In the early 1800s, more than 200 crimes were punishable by death. Such **capital offenses** included not only murder but also shoplifting, sheep stealing, and impersonating an army veteran. In practice, some juries refused to convict criminals, because the punishments were so harsh. Executions were public occasions, and the hanging of a well-known murderer might attract thousands of curious spectators. Afterward, instead of receiving a proper burial, the criminal's body might be given to a medical college for dissection.

Reformers began to reduce the number of capital offenses. By 1850, the death penalty was reserved for murder, piracy, treason, and arson. Many petty criminals were instead transported to **penal colonies**, or settlements for convicts, in the new British territory of Australia. In 1868, Parliament ended public hangings. Additional reforms improved prison conditions and outlawed imprisonment due to debt.

 **Checkpoint** How did abolition and criminal justice reform reflect Victorian values?

Victories for the Working Class

“Four [ghosts] haunt the Poor: Old Age, Accident, Sickness and Unemployment,” declared Liberal politician David Lloyd George in 1905. “We are going to [expel] them.” Parliament had begun passing laws aimed at improving social conditions as early as the 1840s. During the early 1900s, it passed a series of additional reforms designed to help the men, women, and children whose labor supported the new industrial society.

Improving Working Conditions As you have read, working conditions in the early industrial age were grim and often dangerous. Gradually, Parliament passed laws to regulate conditions in factories and mines. In 1842, for example, mineowners were forbidden to employ



Abolitionist Poster

Abolitionists hoped that ending the slave trade would also bring about the end of slavery. As this poster shows, even ending slavery did not end the economic mistreatment of people of African descent.



women or children under age 10. An 1847 law limited women and children to a 10-hour day. Later in the 1800s, the government regulated many safety conditions in factories and mines—and sent inspectors to see that the laws were enforced. Other laws set minimum wages and maximum hours of work.

The Growth of Labor Unions Early in the Industrial Revolution, labor unions were outlawed. Under pressure, government and business leaders slowly accepted worker organizations. Trade unions were made legal in 1825 but it remained illegal to go on strike until later in the century.

Despite restrictions, unions spread, and gradually they won additional rights. Between 1890 and 1914, union membership soared. Besides winning higher wages and shorter hours for workers, unions pressed for other laws to improve the lives of the working class.

Later Reforms During the late 1800s and early 1900s, both political parties enacted social reforms to benefit the working class. Disraeli sponsored laws to improve public health and housing for workers in cities. Under Gladstone, an education act called for free elementary education for all children. Gladstone also pushed to open up government jobs based on merit rather than on birth or wealth.

Another force for reform was the Fabian Society, a socialist organization founded in 1883. The Fabians promoted gradual change through legal means rather than by violence. Though small in number, the Fabians had a strong influence on British politics.

In 1900, socialists and union members backed the formation of a new political party, which became the Labour Party. (“Labour” is the British spelling of “labor.”) The Labour Party would quickly grow in power and membership until, by the 1920s, it surpassed the Liberal Party and became one of Britain’s two major parties.

▼ **Riots in Hyde Park, London**

An 1866 meeting of the Reform League in London dissolved into rioting. Riots such as these helped bring about the Second Reform Bill in 1867.





In the early 1900s, Britain began to pass social welfare laws to protect the well-being of the poor and disadvantaged. These laws were modeled on those Bismarck had introduced in Germany. They protected workers with accident, health, and unemployment insurance as well as old-age pensions. One result of such reforms was that Marxism gained only limited support among the British working class. The middle class hailed reforms as proof that democracy was working.

✓ Checkpoint Describe several social welfare reforms during the 1800s and early 1900s.



▲ A Liberal Party poster from 1911

The Struggle to Win Votes for Women

In Britain, as elsewhere, women struggled against strong opposition for the right to vote. Women themselves were divided on the issue. Some women opposed suffrage altogether. Queen Victoria, for example, called the suffrage struggle “mad, wicked folly.” Even women in favor of suffrage disagreed about how best to achieve it.

Suffragists Revolt By the early 1900s, Emmeline Pankhurst, a leading suffragist, had become convinced that only aggressive tactics would bring victory. Pankhurst and other radical suffragists interrupted speakers in Parliament, shouting, “Votes for women!” until they were carried away. They collected petitions and organized huge public demonstrations. When mass meetings and other peaceful efforts brought no results, some women turned to more drastic, violent protest. They smashed windows or even burned buildings. Pankhurst justified such tactics as necessary to achieve victory. “There is something that governments care far more for than human life,” she declared, “and that is the security of property, so it is through property that we shall strike the enemy.” As you have read, some suffragists went on hunger strikes, risking their lives to achieve their goals.

Victory at Last Even middle-class women who disapproved of such radical and violent actions increasingly demanded votes for women. Still, Parliament refused to grant women’s suffrage. Not until 1918 did Parliament finally grant suffrage to women over age 30. Younger women did not win the right to vote for another decade.

✓ Checkpoint Why do you think women disagreed about how best to gain suffrage?

Instability in Ireland

Throughout the 1800s, Britain faced the ever-present “Irish question.” The English had begun conquering Ireland in the 1100s. In the 1600s, English and Scottish settlers colonized Ireland, taking possession of much of the best farmland.

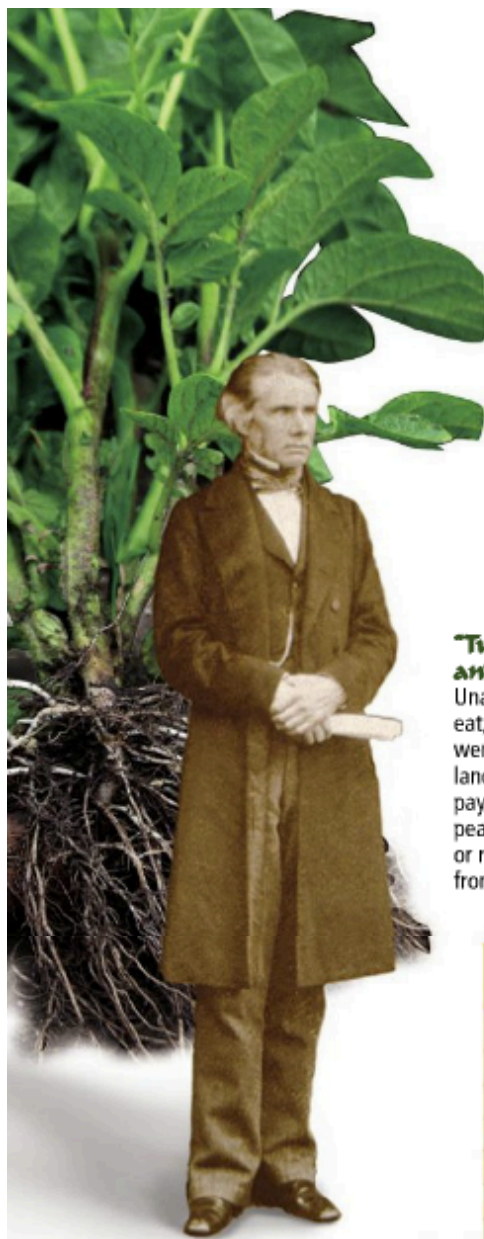
The Irish never accepted English rule. They bitterly resented settlers, especially absentee landlords who owned large estates but did not live on them. Many Irish peasants lived in desperate poverty, while paying high rents to landlords living in England. In addition, the Irish, most of whom were Catholic, had to pay tithes to support the Church of England. Under these conditions, resistance and rebellion were common.

Vocabulary Builder

drastic—(DRAS tik) *adj.* severe, harsh, extreme

● INFOGRAPHIC

The Irish Potato Famine



Under British rule, three quarters of Irish farmland was used to grow crops that were exported. The potato was the main source of food for most of the Irish people. In 1845, disaster struck. A blight, or disease, destroyed the potato crop. Other crops, such as wheat and oats, were not affected. Yet British landowners continued to ship these crops outside Ireland, leaving little for the Irish except the blighted potatoes. The result was a terrible famine that the Irish called the "Great Hunger." In four years, about one million Irish men, women, and children died of starvation or disease. Many more emigrated to the United States and Canada. The Great Hunger left a legacy of Irish bitterness toward the English.

"Tumbled" Houses and Eviction ▶

Unable to grow potatoes to sell or eat, thousands of penniless tenants were evicted from their homes by landlords who needed the rent to pay their taxes. The roofs of the peasants' homes were "tumbled," or removed, to prevent the tenants from returning.



Number of Overseas Emigrants from Ireland, 1851–1921*

| | |
|------------------------|------------------|
| 1851–1860 | 1,216,219 |
| 1861–1870 | 818,582 |
| 1871–1880 | 542,703 |
| 1881–1890 | 734,475 |
| 1891–1900 | 461,282 |
| 1901–1910 | 485,461 |
| 1911–1921 | 355,295 |
| Total 1851–1921 | 4,614,017 |

*Primarily to the United States, Canada, Australia, and New Zealand

SOURCE: Commission on Emigration and Other Population Problems, Dublin, 1954

Human Suffering ▼

One official told of entering what he thought was a deserted village. In one home, he saw "six famished and ghastly skeletons, to all appearances dead..." huddled in a corner on some filthy straw. "I approached with horror and found by a low moaning they were alive—they were in a fever, four children, a woman and what had once been a man...."

Limited Relief Measures ▲

Charles Trevelyan, the senior British official in charge of Irish relief efforts, held ruthless views of the Irish, insisting that they learn to "depend upon themselves...instead of...the assistance of the Government on every occasion."

Thinking Critically

- Graph Skills** Which decade saw the greatest number of emigrants from Ireland?
- Draw Conclusions** Do you think the Irish famine was more accurately described as a natural disaster or a human-made disaster? Why?






Irish Nationalism Like the national minorities in the Austrian empire, Irish nationalists campaigned vigorously for freedom and justice in the 1800s. Nationalist leader Daniel O’Connell, nicknamed “the Liberator,” organized an Irish Catholic League and held mass meetings to demand repeal of unfair laws. “My first object,” declared O’Connell, “is to get Ireland for the Irish.”

Under pressure from O’Connell and other Irish nationalists, Britain slowly moved to improve conditions in Ireland. In 1829, Parliament passed the Catholic Emancipation Act, which allowed Irish Catholics to vote and hold political office. Yet many injustices remained. Absentee landlords could evict tenants almost at will. Other British laws forbade the teaching and speaking of the Irish language.

Struggle for Home Rule The famine in Ireland (see facing page) left the Irish with a legacy of bitterness and distrust toward Britain. In the 1850s, some Irish militants organized the Fenian Brotherhood. Its goal was to liberate Ireland from British rule by force. In the 1870s, moderate Irish nationalists found a rousing leader in Charles Stewart Parnell. He rallied Irish members of Parliament to press for **home rule**, or local self-government. The debate dragged on for decades.

The “Irish question” disrupted English politics. At times, political parties were so deeply split over the Irish question that they could not take care of other business. As prime minister, Gladstone pushed for reforms in Ireland. He ended the use of Irish tithe money to support the Anglican church and tried to ease the hardships of Irish tenant farmers. New laws prevented landlords from charging unfair rents and protected the rights of tenants to the land they worked.

Finally, in 1914, Parliament passed a home rule bill. But it delayed putting the new law into effect when World War I broke out that year. As you will read, the southern counties of Ireland finally became independent in 1921.

 **Checkpoint** How did English policies toward Ireland affect the cause of Irish Nationalism?

SECTION 2 Assessment

Progress Monitoring Online

For: Self-quiz with vocabulary practice
Web Code: naa-2323

Terms, People, and Places

- Place each of the key terms at the beginning of the section into these two categories: economic or political. Write a sentence for each term explaining your choice.

Note Taking

- Reading Skill: Categorize** Use your chart to answer the Focus Question: What social and economic reforms were passed by the British Parliament during the 1800s and early 1900s?

Comprehension and Critical Thinking

- Summarize** Describe three reforms that helped the British working class.
- Compare Points of View** What actions did women suffragists take to achieve their goals? How did the views of women differ regarding tactics?
- Identify Central Issues** (a) Why did Irish nationalists oppose British rule? (b) Describe two reforms that improved conditions in Ireland.

Writing About History

Quick Write: Write a Thesis Statement
Write the thesis statement for an editorial written by an Irish nationalist of the late 1800s or early 1900s. First, decide whether your main goal is to win support for your cause from the Irish or to persuade members of the British Parliament.