

CHARTISM AND EDUCATION

Before the Industrial Revolution education was scarce, expensive and restricted to boys. Also it was mostly religious based. So it was exclusively for the elite. The only education for other classes was at Sunday School where reading was sometimes taught.

In 1811 the National Society for Promoting the Education of the Poor and in 1814 the British and Foreign School Society were formed to try to develop schooling in industrial towns. Together they worked to limit the number of hours children worked in factories/mills so that they got some schooling. Some children were more fortunate than others in that some forward thinking mill owners set up schools for the offspring of their workers.

In 1833 new legislation restricted employment of children in factories. The House of Commons granted £20,000 to the two societies. This was the first time the government financed education.

The 1834 report on the 1832 Poor Law Amendment Act made it clear to parliament that it had a duty to promote the religious and moral education of the working classes. It was felt it was necessary to extend literacy skills so that people could understand their responsibilities as citizens.

The person who seemed most concerned with the benefits of people being educated generally was William Lovett. Of Cornish origins, he moved to London to work as a cabinet maker. He became politically aware and a radical.

In 1836 he founded the London Working Men's Association whose original purpose was to educate the working classes. He got side-tracked into Chartism. When the First Chartist Convention met in 1839 in London it elected Lovett as secretary. Because of a speech he made in Birmingham when the Chartist Convention met there he was arrested and imprisoned in Warwick Gaol with fellow Chartist John Collins.

In 1841 together they wrote Chartism: a New Organisation of the People. It was to implement his New Move Education Initiative through which he hoped poor workers and their children would be able to better themselves. Amongst many, many things (it was a hugely wordy document) he called for there to be Public Halls or Schools which could be used by children in the daytime and in the evening by adults. In the evenings there would be lectures on morals and on physical and political science. He also wanted there to be district circulating libraries so that Reading Groups could be set up.

All this was to be funded by a 1p per week subscription paid by Chartists who had signed the National Petition. As less than 500 signed there was not enough money raised. In fact there was only enough to fund Sunday School education.