

Why did people become Chartists in the 1830s?

I am a stocking weaver from Nottingham. But no one seems to be buying stockings at the moment and I have been out of work for two months. You have to be rich to be a Member of Parliament (MP) because they do not get paid. We want a 'People's Parliament' with MPs from all walks of life. This would mean that, from now on, MPs should be paid.

Parliament does not pass laws to help the working people. In 1833 it passed a Factory act, but that did not protect factory children as much as it should have. We can stop Parliament making bad decisions by having an election every year.

I am a printer. I want to be an MP but I can't because I do not own any property. People should be able to become an MP even if they do not own property.

From Tregate in Cornwall, I see that many of the people in our village have the problem that when they go to the market square and people hold up the ballot papers of the candidates. Our landlord thinks he should be able to see the votes and watches to see who his tenants vote for. If he sees the wrong way, he throws them out of their homes. That is why everyone should be able to vote in secret.

Last summer the harvest was bad and the price of bread is high. I have not worked for months. I fear having to take my family into the dreaded workhouse. Parliament does not care about people like me; the workhouses are prisons for the poor. I want every man in the country over the age of 21 to have the vote. That will stop Parliament introducing laws that penalise the poor.

I live in Birmingham. In 1832 we demanded that we were given MPs and the Reform Act gave us two. We should have more because there 100,000 people living in Birmingham. There is a place in Suffolk which has one MP and a population of only 2,000. This is unfair and ridiculous. Constituencies should be the same size.