

Radicals

Who were the radicals and what were their grievances?

In 1800, very few people had the right to vote. Politics and the running of the government was limited to a small number of wealthy people. At the end of the eighteenth century, some people, later called radicals, questioned if this was the best method of government.



The most important radical writer at this time was Thomas Paine. Paine was born in Thetford and moved to America, where he played an influential role in drafting the Declaration of Independence. He later moved to France and became involved in the French Revolution, working with the leaders to produce the Declaration of the Rights of Man. Paine wrote a book called 'The Rights of Man' which said that everybody should have the right to be involved in government. His book sold half a million copies and was read by many more, passed around between groups of people and used as the discussion topic at political meetings.

Inspired by these ideas, groups of radicals formed corresponding societies in some larger towns. They began to meet at the same time that a revolution was taking place in France, during the late 1780s and the 1790s. The government in Britain was

worried that these societies might start a revolution too. They became very concerned when the French revolutionaries executed their king. Many radicals were arrested and laws passed to ban corresponding societies and unions.

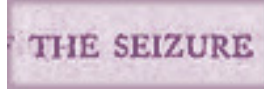
Thomas Hardy was a radical and the Secretary of the London Corresponding Society. It was the first radical group to be open to everyone. Their motto was that 'our members be unlimited'. Hardy wanted to send a petition to Parliament in the hope that the political system would be reformed. Alarmed by the events in France and by the popularity of the London Corresponding Society, officials arrested Thomas Hardy in May 1794 for high treason. Shortly after his arrest, supporters of the government attacked Hardy's house. The shock resulted in the death of his pregnant wife.

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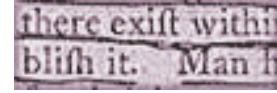
Find out more from these original sources:



London Corresponding Society handbill, 1793



Arrest of Thomas Hardy, 1794



'The Rights of Man' by Thomas Paine, 1792