

How problems they  
faced between 1812  
to 1822 essay



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Lord Liverpool gained the premiership at a changing and unpredictable time. The end of war with France, and Napoleon's readiness to create peace between France and Britain had taken the government and the country as a whole by surprise, surprise that can be seen through the repercussions that followed.

This time, peace really did seem assured, and this was recognised in the now useless war economy. Around 300, 000 men were demobilized, creating many unemployed men and much discourse among the working classes up and down the country from whence these men came. Employment was not particularly plentiful at this time, and the economy could not hope to absorb so many so quickly. The apparent injustice done against these brave patriots created discontent and fuel for reformists and opposition to Liverpool's government. Industry suffered as well, since demand for weapons of war had died out, rendering machinery and military focused factories would need to invest much money in finding alternate industrial markets to break into. One of the most controversial problems to arise were the issues over government intervention in the agricultural economy.

The end of the Napoleonic wars spelt trouble for land owners and land workers. During the wars, the best source of corn was at home, since Britain's relations with Europe were shaky to say the least. British farmers enjoyed monopoly over corn supplies, and during the wars agriculture had one of the surest economies. But with the sudden end of the war, Britain was left with an economy unprepared for peace. Not only that, but France's readiness to become allies was to reopen a whole untapped European

market to Britain, which was set to flood the country with cheap corn, and cripple Britain's domestic corn market.

Liverpool was forced into passing laws to preserve the domestic corn market, as most of the House of Commons and all of the House of Lords were great land owners, and with the drop of corn prices, their land would become worthless and they would lose their main source of income. Farmers who pleaded for legislation to protect their interest received undue support from a massive proportion of parliament, which if anything demanded domestic corn market protection legislation much more than the actual farmers. Lord Liverpool replied to these pressures with the 1815 Corn Laws. The basic premise for these laws were that foreign corn could not be imported until the price of domestic corn reached 80 shillings a quarter. This is not Lord Liverpool at his most effective unfortunately.

The only good things that came from these laws was the guaranteed employment of those workers and farmers in agriculture, but any benefits were far outweighed by the downside, that domestic corn sellers could charge what they wanted for corn, since they had an internal monopoly. This benefited the landed gentry greatly, who made most of their money out of agriculture, and as long as the Corn Laws existed, their incomes were secured. Unfortunately it made the lives of the poor working classes very difficult, who could barely keep up with the rising corn prices, and although very few people starved, thousands went hungry. These 'hunger politics' incurred the dislike of the virtually the entire working class who suffered from food shortages, and to the working and lower middle classes, this gave

fuel to radicals and reformers who opposed government, and saw this law as a symbol for the supremacy of the aristocratic and the landed gentry.

Industrialists and industrial workers were also embittered against the government, feeling that it was grossly unfair to give favours to one division of the economy and not the other. From what we can see here, it is obvious that when it comes down to it, this was just a blatant piece of class bias. For all people may say, about Liverpool doing it to protect the economy to benefit all the people, if the poor, the majority of the population, can't get bread on their tables, then these laws are not benefiting the people, even with any indirect economic benefits. Liverpool and his government rushed out this law because of the pressures of other people, without thinking of the greater good, to protect the rich and make the poor poorer. It wasn't even that effective in boosting the domestic agricultural market anyway.

However, Liverpool did introduce a sliding scale for corn prices in the 1920s, where he successfully managed to adapt the desires of reactionary land owners for the changing economic times, which may have redeemed him somewhat. The rest of his domestic problems seem to stem from social discord among the middle and working classes. Well-educated middle class radicals were now taking the fight against the aristocracy and the landed gentry to the oppressed working men of England. These people could be seen congregating around pubs and giving speeches to the workers assembled there, informing them of the injustices of government and the dormant power held by the working classes over their greedy upper class masters, should they but unite and take it. These speakers were at the forefront of the battle for educating workers, because then they could spread <https://assignbuster.com/how-problems-they-faced-between-1812-to-1822-essay/>

their ideals better with pamphlets and posters, instead of having to give speeches to the illiterate working classes in pubs and on street corners all the time.

These domestic movements were starting to pick up momentum, and parliament once again decided something had to be done to protect their interests. Extreme radicals and anarchists started rearing their heads. In 1820, Arthur Thistlewood was arrested and executed following the discovery of the "Cato Street Conspiracy", a plot to assassinate the entire parliamentary cabinet. Liverpool replied to this and other dangers with the Six Acts of 1819. All this legislation did was ban the unauthorised training of workers with weapons, increase the discretionary powers of magistrates over public meetings and put a tax on newspaper publications. The results of this were not directly significant, but what they did do was restore the upper classes' faith in the government.

Magistrates saw this as a symbol of government solidarity behind them, and were more ready to do their duties against criminals. The middle and upper classes stopped panicking over the apparent threat of domestic revolution, all be that it may never have existed. The effect on the general public proves how effective this measure was. The government utilized this tactic again later in the year following the "Peterloo Massacre", where peaceful working class protestors were attacked and in some events killed, after the magistrates ordered the Yeomanry to intervene.

Liverpool and his cabinet disagreed with the actions of the Manchester magistrates and the Yeomanry, as they were not following Home Office

policy, but supported them in the eyes of the public, as a means of showing government solidarity and approval of the civil service and the magistrates. To show disapproval would be to show discontent in Liverpool's government, and opposition would fall on this as a demonstration of the weakness of the present government. By showing such solidarity, it could make an impression on the public that if the government were so confident of their actions, they couldn't have been doing wrong, and so some may have been influenced that the government were in the right. From what we have seen, one might suppose that Liverpool is exclusively looking after the interests of himself and his government colleagues, but he also genuinely wanted to help the poor. He passed a Poor Employment bill in 1817, which set aside State loans of £750, 000 encouraging the poor to work in local public schemes. This shows he was not averse to attempting to make life easier for the poor by providing unemployment, but he could not do much for fear of being labelled a reformist and a radical, and then losing support and gaining dislike.

Much like Pitt before him, he tried to appeal to all sides, rich and poor. We can see that helping his rich peers was, not unfairly considering the times, part of his agenda, through acts like the 1815 Corn Laws. This may have been due to peer pressure, which shows a weakness in Liverpool that reduced his effectiveness throughout 1812 to 1822. But most of the time he tried to do what was best for Britain at a time of social and economic turmoil, and in answer to how effective his replies to these were, we just have to see that towards the end of this period, the greatest proportion of domestic difficulties seemed to leave his period in office.