

How repressive was  
lord liverpool's tory  
government in  
dealing with the  
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The measures taken by the Tory government were most definitely repressive; however, if their repression was measured against the crises that were facing it, we can clearly justify most of their actions as necessary. In this essay, I am going to examine the oppressive nature of this British government and explore the reasons as to why they were given the title “harsh”, or in some cases, “reasonable”. To understand the Tory government’s reasons for their actions, it is worthwhile to consider the disturbances of the time and some background knowledge, which led up to such measures being introduced during the period I am going to write about in this paper.

Lord Liverpool’s government had been in office since 1812. The occurrence of the French Revolution in 1789 had created some impact on the British population. The French Revolution was thoroughly a very radical change in that no other country before that time had had its people rise against a lawful monarch, overthrown him and his family, and eventually publicly executed them.

Although the French Revolution did not “introduce” radicalism in Britain, as it had previously existed before, it most definitely encouraged it. There was talk of abolition of the monarchy; people wanted to hold a free general election and; a fair representation in the government from all the classes, was proposed. London Corresponding Society was one of the many societies set up as a result of the French Revolution. They wanted a free and fair election as well as denouncing of the monarchy. None of these ideas were new as intellectuals and writers had been discussing them for at least twenty years before the French Revolution. However, the novelty of the 1800s

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radicalism was that the extent of support for these ideas was now being shown by the working people.

A Key figure in the introduction of the radical ideas was Thomas Paine. He was an author and he attacked various important politicians in his books. He wrote a book called "Rights of Man", where he called for democracy and republicanism throughout Europe. He also believed that taxes should be saved by the government and usefully spent on a range of social benefits, including family allowances. His books were immensely attractive to skilled workers. His books were rather simple to understand, which made it more comprehensible and attractive to the working people, who had some interest in politics. Paine's influence on radicalism in Britain was substantially greater than that of the German socialist revolutionary Karl Marx in the last nineteenth century.

After the end of the Napoleonic War in 1815, economic recession was born in Britain. During the war, demand for weapons was aplenty. The industries associated with war effort, enjoyed a boom period. However, after the war, the industries no longer needed many workers, thus many people lost their jobs, leading to unemployment. It was inevitable that depression was to follow.

In the countryside, the British farmers had enjoyed a good profit, as the wartime blockades had stopped other countries from trading with Britain. As soon as the war was over, people started buying foreign corn, which was much cheaper, thus, the agricultural industry faced depression.

The Tory government was made up of rich landowners, who at the end of the day, were on the lookout for their own interest. Thus, they passed a law, which altered the tariff on foreign corn only when the domestic market price for corn reached a reasonable standard of sale - which was known as the Corn Laws. The people hated paying these high prices and when, after a dreadful harvest in 1816, the prices rose even higher - the workers demanded a rise in wages to afford food. Food riots and strikes were everywhere in Britain - the country was in a crisis, with children suffering from malnutrition and adults starving.

The Corn Laws had an important political impact on Manchester. Manchester was a growing city with lots of working class people residing there, which came about with the introduction of factories. The people rioted for a fair wage, but a harmful, armed demonstration was hardly on the protestors' minds, when they conducted a meeting on St. Peter's field, on August 16th 1819.

Some sixty-thousand men, women and children had gathered peacefully in St. Peters Fields. Corn Law was one of the main issues that were going to be addressed by Henry Hunt, a leading radical. The magistrate had ordered the crowd to disperse but they had remained rooted to the spot. Finally, they were diffused by armed voluntary soldiers (cavalry). Eleven people were killed and more than four hundred injured. This incident was named the Peterloo Massacre, a mocking comparison with the British victory at Waterloo in 1815. This disgraceful event provided moral support to the people to press for Parliamentary reform.

Furthermore, between 1811 and 1817, the Nottinghamshire Luddites were responsible for organising attacks on factories and machine wrecking and conspirators met in Cato Street (London) to devise a plan to assassinate all the members of the Liverpool's Cabinet.

These crises were the outline of the problems facing Lord Liverpool's government. Next, the Liverpool's government had no choice but introduce measures against the disturbances.

They introduced the system of 'agent provocateurs', who were informers who caused unrest in order to find the real troublemakers. The suspension of the Habeas Corpus meant that anyone could be arrested without any evidence. Finally, the high point of the Tory government repression came when they introduced the Six Acts:

The Training Prevention Act prohibited civilian bodies from training in the use of weapons. This piece of legislation hardly seems out of place in the modern world, let alone in the period of disaffection of the 18-teens. It also limited the activities of the agents provocateurs. - This was probably an important and necessary measure taken by the government. Having weapon always means that the person has the potential to either take his own or another person's life. Learning how to use these weapons simply meant that he would be willing to someday use them against somebody. Common people training to use weapons could lead to an armed revolution.

The Seizure of Arms Act, linked to the Training Prevention Act, gave JPs and magistrates the right to search private houses for weapons, to seize them and their possessors - Having a weapon is dangerous and even today, if one <https://assignbuster.com/how-repressive-was-lord-liverpools-tory-government-in-dealing-with-the-crises-facing-it-in-1815-1821-essay-sample/>

owns a weapon he/she has to account for its use and attain a passport. This was another essential Act passed by the Tories and I think it well justifies as to why they might have wanted to seize the weapons, which was in possession of common, radical people.

The Seditious Meetings Act restricted to parish level all public meetings that were called to discuss 'any public grievance or any matter on Church and State'. Organisers had to provide local magistrates with due notice of the time and place of the meeting. The magistrates were empowered to change the date and/or time of the meeting at will, to prevent any attempt to organise insurrection - A harsh Act. People not being able to discuss their ideas, views amongst a couple of similar minded people, is seriously grave. However, often these exchanges of ideas do turn quite heated, which ends up people wanting to make a change and not simply "discuss" the ideas. I feel that the Tory government were afraid that "something" was going to be done, thus, they felt if they ended meeting altogether, people will not be able to plan or unify against the government. Repressive Act.

The Blasphemous and Seditious Libels Act fixed the penalties for these activities to fourteen years' transportation. Magistrates were empowered to seek, seize and confiscate all libellous materials in the possession of the accused. This piece of legislation was not especially effective because it was never enforced rigorously, and also because of Fox's 1792 Libel Act. Juries were reluctant to convict people on flimsy evidence - Another Act passed simply because the government felt this could turn into something massive.

If a lot of slanderous information about the Tories were passed around,

people could start to think that it was time for Parliament reform. I think this <https://assignbuster.com/how-repressive-was-lord-liverpools-tory-government-in-dealing-with-the-crises-facing-it-in-1815-1821-essay-sample/>

was simply barring people from saying what they felt about the government. Repressive Act.

The Misdemeanours Act provided for speedier legal machinery so that people could be brought to trial faster - This reduced the likelihood of bail being obtained by the accused; it also allowed for quicker convictions. This was good measure to be taken as the Tories did not want criminals to be walking free on bail. Stricter rules meant that the people of afraid of doing something against the law, thus, passing radical ideas, thinking of political reform, was simply not acceptable. This was, on the whole, justifiable.

The Newspaper and Stamp Duties Act greatly increased the taxes on printed matter, including newspapers, periodicals and pamphlets. Publishers and printers had to provide securities for their ' good behaviour'. Any publication appearing at least once a month, and costing less than 6d. was subject to a tax of 4d. The Act restricted the freedom of the legitimate press. Radical publications simply went ' underground' - The Act meant that most working class, lower-middle class people could not buy newspapers, as they were so expensive, thus, not have much radical thought against the government. The government was repressing people from talking freely about what they wanted to. This way, oppression was at its highest. I feel that the Tories felt that writing gave rise to different thoughts and views, which could lead to organisation of a Revolution against the government. On the whole, this was a rather repressive Act.

The measures that Lord Liverpool and his cabinet ministers took were very harsh, if looked at without understand the problems facing the government

to start off with. I feel that during that era, repression was looked upon as an order and they measures, do seem cruel and harsh, when looked at with modern eyes, but 1800s people took them on as if it was nothing out of the ordinary. They were simply " more rules" by the government that one had to follow. The Newspaper and Stamp Duties act, for example, was a very cruel Act, which meant that the lower classes were unable to think radically and not comprehend the extent of exploitation they were faced with, by the government. I think that the government blew up the idea of ' radicalism'.

It was certainly true that the French Revolution had awakened ' radicalism' in masses - it had not penetrated entirely into the society. The drastic measures taken by Lord Liverpool and his cabinet ministers are seemingly harsh, but taking into account the problems/radical changes they thought the French Revolution and Thomas Paine's impact would create, my view changes and I can now justify most of their actions.