**The Chartist Movement**

Chartism was a working class movement which emerged in 1836 in London. It expanded rapidly across the country and was most active between 1838 and 1848. The aim of the Chartists was to gain political rights and influence for the working classes. Their demands were widely publicized through their meetings and pamphlets. The movement got its name from the People’s Charter which listed its six main aims:

All men to have the vote (universal manhood suffrage)

Voting should take place by secret ballot

Parliamentary elections every year, not once every five years

Constituencies should be of equal size

Members of Parliament should be paid

The property qualification for becoming a Member of Parliament should be abolished

**Historical Context of Chartism**

Chartism emerged in Britain in the early 19th century against a backdrop of significant social and economic upheaval. The Industrial Revolution had transformed the economy, creating widespread urbanization and a growing working class that faced poor wages, harsh working conditions, and limited political power. The Great Reform Act of 1832 addressed some electoral inequalities but left the majority of working-class men without the right to vote, deepening frustrations. At the same time, economic downturns, such as the hungry 1840s, caused widespread unemployment and poverty, fueling demands for reform. Inspired by ideas of democracy and equality, Chartism became a mass working-class movement from 1838 to 1848, demanding political rights through the People’s Charter and challenging the political dominance of the elite classes

**Leadership and Divisions**

The Chartist leadership was diverse, and this diversity often led to internal conflict:

1. William Lovett (Moderate Wing): Advocated non-violent, moral force Chartism and education as a means of reform.

2. Feargus O’Connor (Radical Wing): A charismatic but divisive leader who promoted physical force and mass mobilization. He was the editor of the *Northern Star*, the movement’s leading newspaper.

3. Bronterre O’Brien: A socialist thinker who emphasized the need for broader economic reform alongside political changes.

The division between moral force Chartists (peaceful reform) and physical force Chartists (willing to use violence) weakened the movement.