

1800 for the regulation of their wages, and in this they had some support from master manufacturers, who stated that their difficulties were due to the fact that there was no power to settle wages. Instead of their desired regulation the weavers were given an Act providing for arbitration in the cotton trade. This Act was further amended two years later, but does not seem to have been a success. In 1819 the Stockport weavers spoke of it as a law "granted them after spending many thousands of pounds to obtain it; which law professes to redress their grievances, and then to protect them from oppression in future. But the magistrates would not act upon it."

In 1808 the journeymen cotton weavers again petitioned Parliament, asking that a minimum price should be fixed, below which goods should not be manufactured, and drawing attention to their growing distress owing to the bankruptcy of many masters. Their average earnings were then six shillings a week. The master manufacturers also signed a petition for the regulation of wages, and sent six delegates to Parliament, including one from Stockport. The men also sent delegates, whose expenses were paid out of money loaned by different Friendly Societies. The project, however, was turned down by the House of Commons, even Sir Robert Peel, who had subscribed £31 10s. 0d. to the petition, expressing his disapproval of the measure.

Having failed in their appeals to Parliament, to their employers, and to the local authorities, the men struck work, demanding a 33½ per cent. advance in their wages. Stockport was one of the places affected. During the strike one of the master Cotton Spinners of Stockport, for advising the weavers to insist upon their demands but to be peaceable, was sentenced to eighteen months' imprisonment, and many of the operatives' leaders had to leave their homes in Stockport to escape arrest. The strikers apparently gained their ends, but the victory did not last long, and the discord was soon rife again. An improvement took place in 1810, but trade was upset by an extensive strike of spinners. By August of 1810 trade was declining, and the wages of the weavers were seriously reduced. The Stockport weavers petitioned the Prince Regent to intervene on their behalf. Parliament again refused to do anything for the weavers, who from this date began to take up the cause of reform.

In 1811, the invention of a new stocking frame led to the destruction of stocking frames by organised bands of workmen in the Midlands. Early in 1812 social disorders broke out in Cheshire, Lancashire, and Yorkshire, and the Government were convinced that the working classes of those counties were meditating not only the destruction of machinery, but a general revolution. Stockport again figures prominently in these disturbances, which largely arose out of the workers' dislike of the power-loom, which had been made profitable by the supplementary invention of a dressing machine, patented by William Radcliffe, of Stockport, in 1803 and 1804. The following are extracts from "A Report of the Secret Committee of the House of Lords on the Disturbed State of certain Counties"—

"Subscriptions for the persons taken into custody in Nottinghamshire were solicited in the month of February at Stockport, in Cheshire, where anonymous letters were at the same time circulated, threatening to destroy the machinery used in the manufactures of that place, and in that and the following months attempts were made to set on fire two different manufactories. The spirit of discontent then rapidly spread through the neighbourhood, inflammatory placards, inviting the people to a general rising, were dispersed,