

Depth Study H - Poverty and Poor Relief, c.1790-1850

SOURCE A: From an account of allowance systems, such as Speenhamland, taken from a school textbook written in the 1960s.

Under the allowance system, it was humiliating for fully employed labourers to receive part of their income in the form of parish charity. Farmers took advantage of the Allowance System to refuse proper increases in wages; they knew the workers could always rely on parish relief.

SOURCE B: From the Poor Law Report of 1834.

The workhouse system means that all poor relief for the able-bodied should be in the workhouse. The workhouse should be an uninviting place. Inmates should not be allowed to go out or receive visitors without written permission from one of the overseers. Beer and tobacco should be banned and all inmates must be forced to work hard. Parish relief should be the last choice of the pauper.

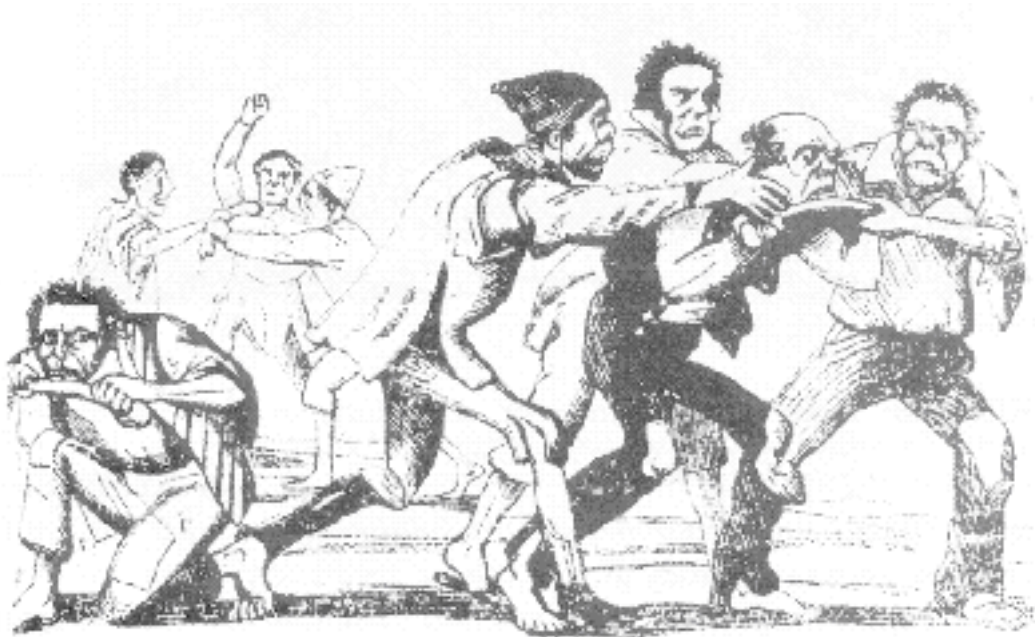
SOURCE C: A drawing of the time showing a workhouse yard in the 1840s.



SOURCE D: From a Report to the Poor Law Commissioners by the Chairman of the Board of Guardians, Market Harborough, Leicestershire, 1836.

I can say that the Poor Law is working very satisfactorily. Great numbers of the labouring poor throughout the area of the Union have accepted it. The workhouse is held in great fear. There is now greater enthusiasm to look for work. There are very few complaints of any bad behaviour.

SOURCE E: A drawing of 1845 showing inmates of the Andover workhouse fighting to eat rotten bones which they had been given to break up.



SOURCE F: From *The Rights of the Poor to Liberty and Life*, R. Oastler, 1838.

The new Poor Law demands that a man shall give up his liberty to save his life! Before he is allowed to eat a piece of bread, he shall be forced to go into prison. Thank God the law of the land does not yet say - though the Commissioners of the New Poor Law have said - that poverty is a crime, by which an Englishman can be deprived of his liberty.
