

**Due:** January 28

*Describe the Corn Laws in England. Why were they put into existence by the British Parliament? What was their purpose (what did they do?) Why were they favored by the landowners and opposed by the industrialists?*

During the forty years following the publication of Adam Smith's *Wealth of Nations*, rivalry between the rising industrial capitalists and the conservative, complacently landed aristocracy dominated the English scene, particularly over the matter of food prices. Since capitalists had to pay at least a subsistence wage to workers, they were vitally interested in lowering grain prices. To this end, they welcomed cheap, imported wheat and corn. Landowners and landlords naturally resented imports because they depressed prices and profits from their own grains.

The landlords' resentment was translated into action in Parliament where they held the majority. The result was the passage of the Corn Laws, which imposed duties on imported grains, thereby effectively keeping low-priced grain out of England. This law stated that no foreign corn would be allowed into Britain until domestic corn reached a price of 80 shillings per quarter. The beneficiaries of the Corn Laws were these landlords who owned the majority of profitable farmland. Landowners had a vested interest in seeing the Corn Laws remain in force. And since the right to vote was not universal, but rather depended on land ownership, voting members of Parliament had no interest in repealing the Corn Laws. In fact, the landlords' political clout was so great that Parliament did not repeal the Corn Laws until thirty years later.

On the other hand, the Corn Laws were opposed by industrialists. The artificially high corn prices encouraged by the Corn Laws meant that the urban working class had to spend the bulk of their income on corn just to survive. Since they had no income left over for other purchases, they could not afford manufactured goods. So manufacturers suffered, and had to lay off workers. These workers had difficulty finding employment, so the economic spiral worsened for everyone involved.