



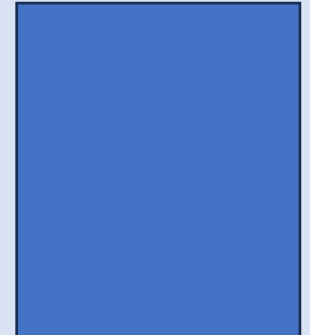
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ECAY6006 The Politics of Activism

Theme 2: Historical Examples of Activism

Campaigning for Change

- Environmental activist and campaigner Edward Abbey has stated;

"Every important change in our society, for the good, at least, has taken place because of popular pressure - pressure from below, from the great mass of people."

(Abbey, 1990)

Social Change

- How do activist movements contribute to social change?
- Movement outcomes can take various forms, for example:
 - Acceptance of excluded groups or behaviours
 - Tangible gains for those in deprivation
 - Institutional changes and reform of policy
 - Altering attitudes and changing behaviours
 - Cultural change,
 - Addressing confusion in identity politics, and,
 - The redistribution of resources

(Shewly & Gerharz, 2023)

Activism as Part of the Sociopolitical Process

- Shewly & Gerharz argue that activist movements should be recognised as part of the **sociopolitical** process
- *What do you understand **sociopolitical** to mean?*
- They are produced in, and by, society
- Because of specific social and political conditions
- Rather than being seen as threats to the sociopolitical system

(Shewly & Gerharz, 2023)

Social Movements

- Social Movements have changed the world in many ways:
 - By overthrowing dictatorships and monarchies
 - Establishing democracies
 - Triggering local policy transformations
 - Instigating change in people's views and perspectives
 - Regarding particular societal and political realms.
- This demonstrates the potential to transform and modify the state and society

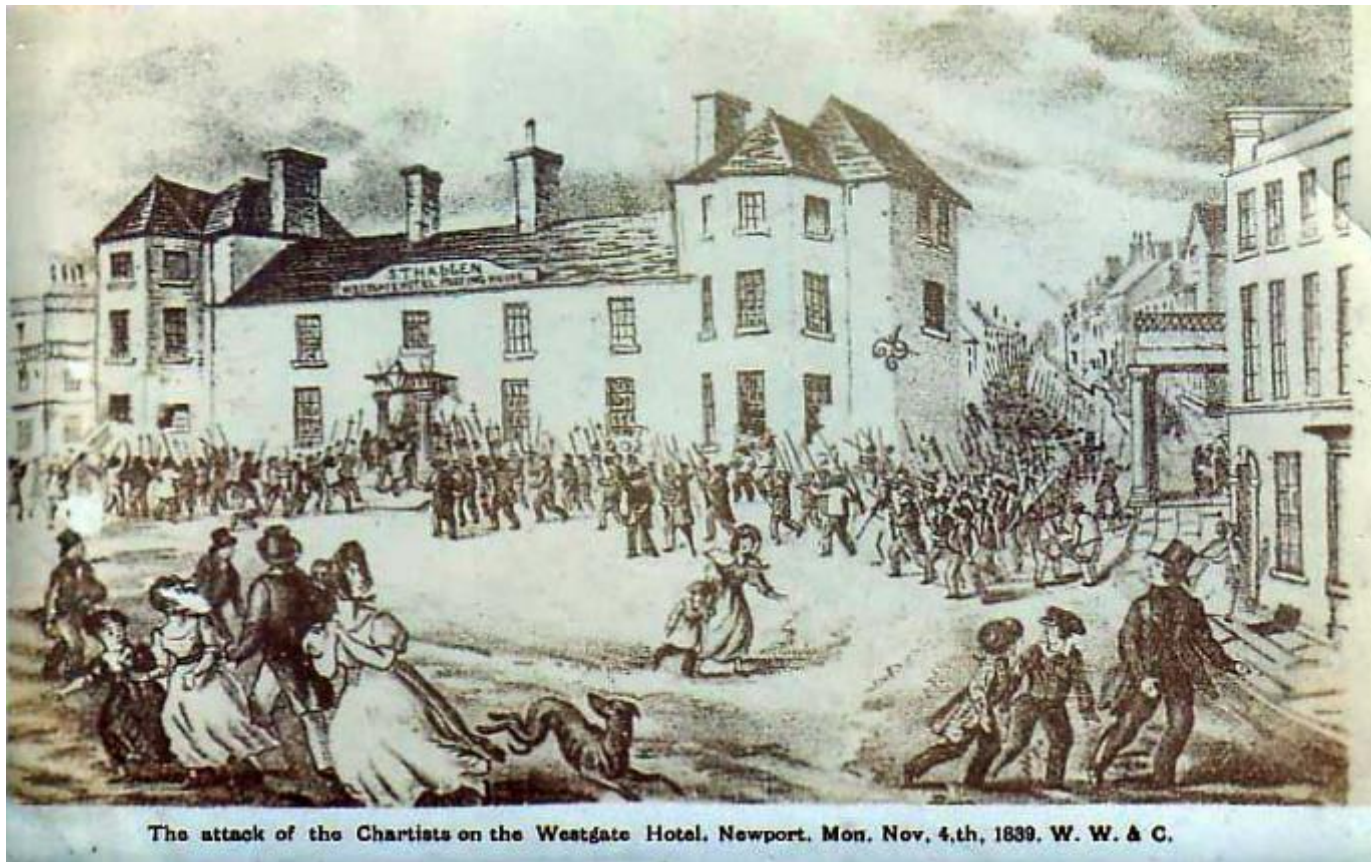
(Shewly & Gerharz, 2023)

Your thoughts

What examples of change caused by social movements can you think of?



Examples From History - Chartism



(Newport Past, no date)

Examples From History – The Match Girls Strike



(National Archive, no date)

Examples From History – The Suffragettes



(The Women's Library at the LSE, no date)

Examples From History – The Civil Rights Movement



(High Museum, The, no date)

Public Attitudes to Social Movements

- Whilst they are often now seen as positive, each of the movements on the previous slides was seen as a threat to society at the time
- This is often the case, especially if the activities are perceived as harmful or highly disruptive (can you think of current examples?)
- Indeed, Feinberg *et al* (2020) argue that the perceived threat of such movements often undermines their effectiveness
- This is an issue that all social movements have had to address

Activism: Passion and Purpose

- Activism is a powerful force that has shaped societies throughout history.
- It represents the conscious effort of individuals or groups to promote social, political, or environmental change, by advocating for their beliefs and values.
- Whether it is advocating for:
 - Civil rights
 - Fighting climate change
 - Promoting gender equality
- Activism plays a vital role in driving process and fostering a more just and equitable world.

(McKeever *et al.*, 2023)

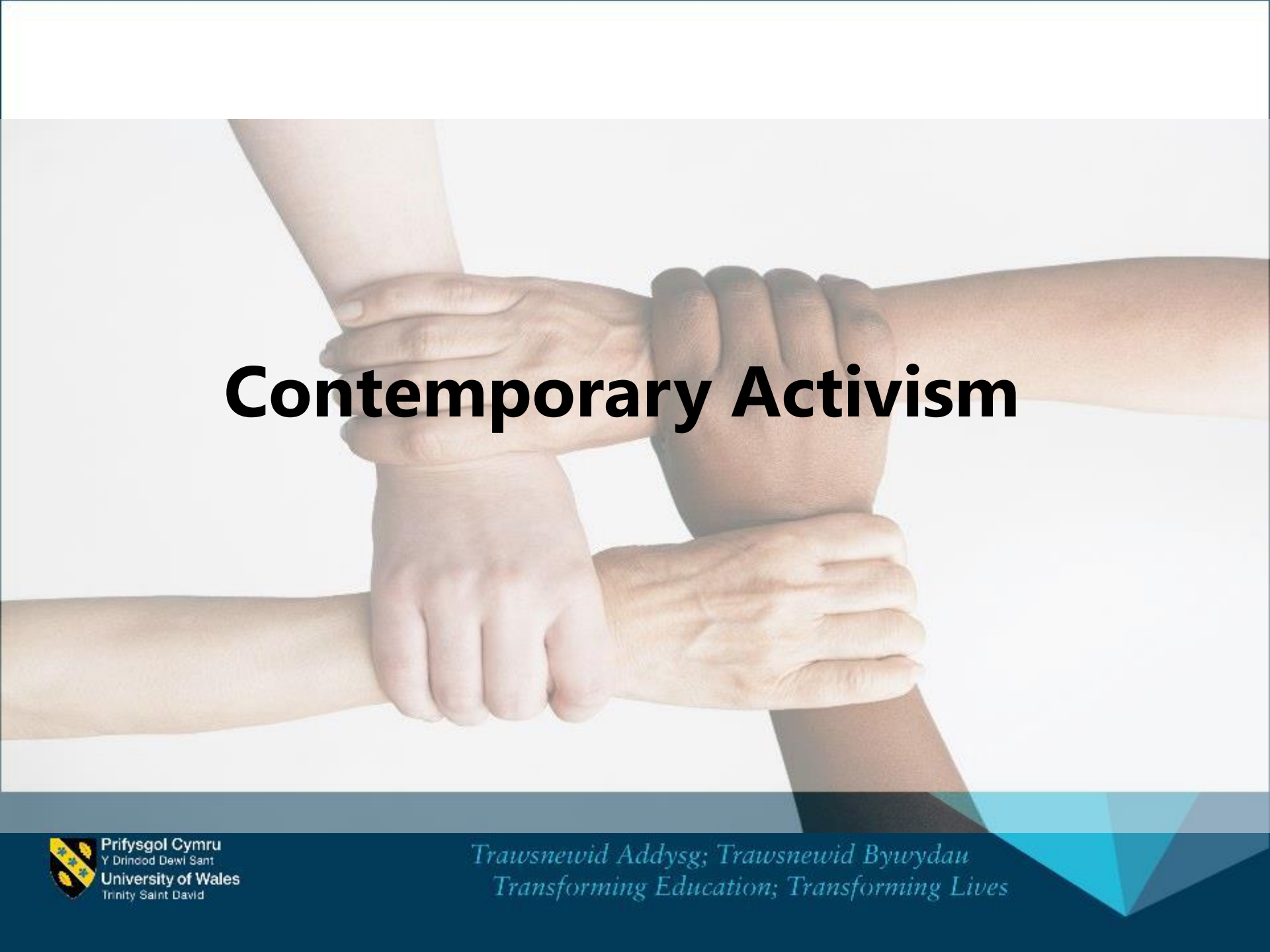
Ancient Roots of Activism

- Examples of activism can be dated back to ancient civilisations.
- In ancient Greece, philosophers, including Socrates, questioned social norms and advocated for critical thinking
- This laid the foundations for 'intellectual activism' on a global level
- This can be seen in events such as the Peasants Revolt and the Reformation

(McKeever *et al.*, 2023)

The Influence of Social Movements

- Social movements do not simply vanish once their goal has been achieved
- Being a product of society themselves, they are themselves subject to continuous change
- These changes may also vary depending on the nature of the movement (Shewly & Gerharz, 2023)
- Each of the movements on the previous slides have links to contemporary political parties or movements
- We will now explore some of those links



Contemporary Activism

Democratic Activism

- The Chartists were campaigning for change in the **democratic** process
- In this, they can be seen in a tradition of liberal and socialist politics
- There are still groups who campaign for changes in **democracy**.
- *Can you think of any?*



Lowering of the Voting Age
(Lumley, 2023)



Welsh Independence
(Yes For Wales, No Date)

Trade Union Activism

- The Match Girls were campaigning for safer working conditions
- In this they can be seen as part of a tradition of socialist or trade union activism
- There are still groups who campaign for changes employment practices
- *Can you think of any?*



Junior Doctors Strike
(British Medical Association, 2023)



Amazon Worker's Rights
(GMB Union, 2024)

Women's Rights Activism

- The Suffragettes were campaigning for improved women's rights (the right to vote, the right to hold property)
- They can be seen to be part of a tradition of feminist activism
- There are still groups who campaign against misogynist practices
- *Can you think of any?*



#MeToo Movement
(#MeToo, 2024)



Take Back The Night
(TBTN, 2024)

Black Civil Rights Activism

- The US Civil Right movement was campaigning for equality for people of colour
- It forms part of a tradition of liberal and post-colonial activism
- There are still groups who campaign against racial prejudice and discrimination
- *Can you think of any?*



Black Lives Matter
(BLM, 2024)



Black Equity Organisation
(BEO, 2024)

Other forms of Activism

- In many ways the previous campaigns can be seen as **progressive** in that they seek to **make** positive changes and there are many other examples
- However, some commentators have argued that there is a growth in the number of **reactionary** activist groups
- They are seen as reacting **against** changes in society (see for example [LeCras, 2020](#))
- The late 20th century and the 21st century have seen a growth in the number and type of campaigning groups from both ends of the spectrum
- Before we explore some of these we will take a moment to consider the terms **progressive** and **reactionary**

Progressive or Reactionary

What do you understand these two phrases to mean?

Progressive

- In favour of equity and social justice
- Seeking to establish the rights of excluded or oppressed groups
- Moving towards a fairer and inclusive society

Reactionary

- In favour of the 'status quo' or keeping things as they are
- Sees change as a threat to stability in society
- Looking back to an idealised society

(For an interesting discussion of this subject see [King, 2009](#))

Environmental Activism

- There are a number of environmentalist groups, each of which differs in their strategies and activities, these include:
- [World Wildlife Fund](#) which works globally to conserve nature and reduce the most pressing threats to the diversity of life on Earth
- [Greenpeace](#) is known for its **direct-action** campaigns, Greenpeace focuses on issues like climate change, deforestation, overfishing, and pollution
- [Just Stop Oil](#) is a British environmental activist group focused on combating climate change by opposing new fossil fuel projects in the UK
- [Extinction Rebellion](#) uses **nonviolent civil disobedience** to compel government action on the 'climate and ecological emergency'
- *But are these groups **progressive** or **reactionary**? Guided Study Activity on Moodle*

Reproductive Rights Activism

- There are activist groups that take very different views on women's reproductive rights
- Progressive (**pro-choice**) groups such as the [Women's Equality Party](#) in the UK party campaigns for full decriminalization of abortion across the UK, ensuring that abortion is free, safe, and legal in every part of the country.
- Other (**pro-life**) groups, such as the [Society for the Protection of Unborn Children](#) (SPUC) are often seen as reactionary as they campaign to end abortion and promote a consistent life ethic that values all human beings from conception.
- It is important to note that Pro-Life campaigns have been a recent focus for [Government policy](#)

Immigration Activism

- Similarly, there are both progressive and reactionary activist groups in this area
- The **progressive** [Joint Council for the Welfare of Immigrants](#) (JCWI) has been advocating for the rights of immigrants since 1967. They provide legal support, campaign against hostile immigration policies, and work to ensure fair treatment for all migrants
- The [Refugee Council](#) supports refugees and asylum seekers, providing essential services and advocating for fair treatment and policies that protect their rights and can be seen as **progressive**
- [English Defence League](#) (EDL) although 'officially' no longer in existence was known for its **reactionary** street protests. They have been involved in various anti-immigration and anti-Muslim demonstrations
- [Britain First](#) is a **far-right** political organization which campaigns against immigration and Islam. They are known for their provocative "Christian patrols" and have been involved in numerous controversial activities.

Animal Rights Activism

- We can also see this split between progressive and reactionary activist groups in the area of animal rights
- The **progressive** group [People for the Ethical Treatment of Animals](#) (PETA) is known for its high-profile campaigns against animal cruelty in various industries, including fashion, food, and entertainment. They advocate for veganism and animal rights through **direct action, public education, and lobbying**.
- The [Hunt Saboteurs Association](#) is a UK-based organization dedicated to stopping the hunting of animals through **direct action** and uses non-violent methods to disrupt hunts and protect wildlife.
- [Countryside Alliance](#) supports legal hunting, shooting, and fishing, putting it in opposition to the organisations above. However, it also campaigns for better rural services, including healthcare, education, and broadband connectivity which makes it more difficult to classify.
- The British Association for Shooting and Conservation advocates for sustainable shooting practices and provides comprehensive advice, training, and education programs but like the Countryside Alliance, they also implement wide-ranging conservation projects to protect wildlife and habitats

Contemporary Activism

- These examples are some of the most publicised forms of activism but they are in no way exhaustive
- You may know of other, more local examples.

Any questions?

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