• Whigs beset by economic problems 1839-1841 and Chartists revived their threat to the Establishment
• Founding on anti-Corn Law league, 1838 – brings the Corn Laws up again for debate
• Bed Chamber crisis of 1839 – Queen Victoria does not like Peel but likes Melbourne so refuses to get rid of her household when the Queen offers Peel ministry
• 1841 Election Result – Tory majority of 80 seats, first time that the people elect in a new government, 137 County votes and only 22 for the Whigs – benefit of the Great Reform Act
  o Won the small rural towns which had not been taken away by the Great Reform Act
  o Bizarrely won in Liverpool through Irish immigrants
  o Preservation of the Corn Laws

4. What is the Newbould version of events with regard to Peel’s victory in 1841?
  – Peel’s success in controlling his party and bringing Ultras onside has been exaggerated
  – Peel was forced to make so many concessions to Ultras that he was unable to attract support of moderate Whigs, Stanley and Graham until June 1835
  – Conservative recovery inevitable = importance of Chandos Amendment
  – Greater attention to Conservative leadership to registration of voters
  – Peel fought 1841 election not on any new Conservative principles, but on traditional defence of Anglican Church and Corn Laws. Peel had dodged issue of Corn Laws. Backbenchers rebelled over extension of the Poor Law Amendment Act which Peel had supported and committed himself too again in 1841 = 102 Tory MPs voted against the Government’s measure
  – 1841 Election Result showed Conservative gains in counties and small English boroughs with fewer than 1000 voters. Conservative performance in larger boroughs much less impressive and hardly any gains on 1835 Election
  – Peel had failed to make a breakthrough in the manufacturing/industrial centres

Sir Robert Peel – Evans pgs 28-47

A King’s Minister out of office: Peel in the 1830s:

• The 9 years after the Great Reform Act saw the Whigs hold power almost without a break
  o Under Earl Grey and then Viscount Melbourne
  o This period was labelled as ‘the decade of reform’
The Public Health Commission was headed by Edwin Chadwick, a social reformer, and its aim was to investigate the state of public health in workhouses, mills, factories and mines all over the country. Although the commission into Public Health was set up by Peel, when it produced its report, highlighting serious health issues, Peel did not take any steps to alter the situation, a Public Health Act was not in fact passed until 1848; two years after Peel’s ministry had ended. This would suggest that Peel merely introduced the commission as a way of appeasing people who criticized his stance on the working classes and yet had no intentions of acting upon the dire working conditions.

Peel was neither heartless nor mean though many opponents accused him of being both. Despite Peel’s lack of true inspiration in fighting the working conditions of the working classes he wanted to make the poorer people more self-sufficient and ‘made numerous charitable donations’ of his own money, many of which were anonymous, during the period of high unemployment and high prices between 1837 and 1842. He sent his own money to the town of Paisley, in the suburbs of Glasgow - £220 and in total of his own money – as well as raising awareness for their drastic cause, including asking the Queen for money. In total he sent the equivalent to half a million pounds to Paisley from a collective group. I think that this charity shows his true intentions in helping the poor though in terms of reform he truly did believe that the working classes and poor were better off if the economy was growing and was more productive.

During the period between 1841 and 1844 Peel and his ministry did also introduce other Acts which were not aimed at the poor, but must be compared to the Acts which he did introduce for the poor to judge the main aim of his domestic reforms. Despite Peel’s direct efforts to adjust working conditions it did very little, during the period he did also introduce other domestic reforms: the Railway Act, Bank Charter Act, Companies Act, an income tax and alterations of tariffs.

The central pillar of Peel’s fiscal reforms was the Bank Charter Act which had no impact on the poorer classes as it was to ‘inspire confidence in the medium of the exchange’. The Railway Act was mainly a safety Act to ensure that railways ran safe services. New lines had to be inspected by the Board of Trade, which could demand traffic returns and inquire into accidents but most importantly in reduced the costs on many lines. This meant that it was much easier and cheaper for poorer people to travel but it affected them very little as most had no-where else to go or visit. The Companies Act placed controls on the formation of companies. All companies had to be officially registered and produce accounts. It had limited success but some companies – those who needed special approval from Parliament were exempt and it had no impact on the lower classes.
• The landed interest constituted a huge amount of Tory support and thus the repeal of the Corn Laws would be viewed as an ultimate betrayal
• Whilst those affected by the Corn Laws was a small percentage of the population, they contributed greatly to the economy
• The official reason given by Peel as to why he waited until late 1845 to repeal the Corn Laws was supposedly the Irish famine, though it can be conceived as ‘the occasion rather than the cause’
  o Immediate repeal would not enable sufficient supplies to be transferred to Ireland
• The Tory Party is often seen synonymous to the ‘Protectionist Party’ as it had assured those in their election campaigns that they would fight towards agricultural protection
• Peel regarded the Anti-Corn Law League with extreme distaste and the repeal of the Corn Laws was the primary objective of this middle class pressure group, he believed that the government should deal with the issue rather than a sectional interest group
• A reason for the delay of Peel’s decision was due to the conflict of opinions at the time and the provocation from both the Anti-Corn Law League and the violent Chartists
• Peel had two main goals:
  o ‘Unify diverse propertied interests’
  o Provide conditions to ‘stimulate economic growth and prosperity’ to increase living standards

Why did Peel repeal the Corn Laws in 1846?

It is unknown how long Peel had had the desire of repealing the Corn Laws but it is clear that he had always advocated free trade. The Corn Laws were a restraint on free trade as they kept the food prices high, meaning that the rich gained at the expense of the poor, symbolic of aristocratic and landed privilege. Peel was led to believe and argue that there was no good reason why agriculture, like other branches of the economy, should not be subject to the regulations of laissez-faire. As a result of such a controversial topic, the repeal was achieved at the price of his own political career. It was perhaps his arrogance which allowed him to believe that he could get away with repealing the Corn Laws as he had got away with Maynooth and Catholic emancipation (to an extent, though he was now Prime Minister), so perhaps he believed that his position was unalterable and that the devotion and support of his backbenchers could not be deterred. Kitson Clark believes that ‘Peel was almost certain that he would be able to get away with it.’ The Corn Laws of 1815 had originally been implemented to ensure that after the Napoleonic Wars the grain price would not drop sharply, like it had done in the rest of Europe; this was done to protect the British agriculturists. Many were of the opinion that once the war was over, Britain could revert to that aspect of free trade but this was never truly addressed until 1846. Peel decided that the famine in Ireland was an appropriate stimulus to continue his fight towards free trade through the repeal of the Corn Laws.
8. How far did Peel’s government carry economic development in Ireland and successfully tackle inequality in land tenure?

- Devon Commission, 1845
  - Looking into the problem of land tenure and to attempt to bring about
    - Require landlords to compensate tenants for construction and work they undertake if they are ousted from the land
    - To have salaried officer to ensure that all improvements were register
  - Resistance from the major land owners in House of Lords who believed it to be an attack on property rights so Peel withdraws it and so it doesn’t aid the Irish