What were the problems faced by the Meiji leaders in 1868? To what extent were these problems solved by the end of the Meiji era.

The Tokugawa Shogunate was overthrown in 1868 due to the internal political economic and social problems, together with the external foreign aggression. Although the Shogunate has fallen down, there still the legacy if it. They became the problems faced by the Meiji leaders in 1868. Luckily, Emperor Meiji was smart and energetic. Most of the problems were solved by the end of the Meiji era. Japan was even able to become a world power in 1912.

For a start, Emperor Meiji faced problems from economic, social, political aspects. For political problems, there was a lack of centralized government. The government was loose due to the division of feudal domains. This was unfavourable for carrying reform. Meiji then centralized the country. The feudal fiefs were abolished in 1871. 75 ken were set up. There were administered directly by civil officials appointed by the central government. In this was, it helped to build a unified Japan, which made the reforms more efficient. Also, Western clans took the lead to put their armies under the command of the Emperor, it not only unified the country but also strengthen the military power.

In socio-economic aspects, the problems that Meiji faced were the social instability. Since the samurai was upset due to conscription of Army, there were frequent uprisings. Also, there were more than 200 peasant uprisings during 1868-1878 due to the continuation of paying high tax and rent of the peasants.

In order to suppress the uprisings, the newly created national army helped to suppress them. Yet, though the former feudal class still dominated politics and the constitution presented the power of the Emperor, political reforms had limitations. Also, the poor living condition of peasants was not improved much. We can see the problems were solved to a certain extent.

Apart from the above, there were financial difficulties. There were the indemnities to the foreigners, compensations to the daimyo, and suppression of the Satsuma risings. Worse still, funds were needed for modernization. There was even depreciation on paper currency. Furthermore, Japan was technologically and militarily backward since she had being ruled by the Tokugawa Shogunate for 2 centuries. It contributed to the low national defense power. Also, her legal system remained feudal. These were also the obstacles for Japan to achieve equal footing with the West.

To solve the financial difficulty, the government tried to avoid borrowing too much from foreigners. Rather, it implemented a new land tax from the peasants which provided a stable source of capital for the government. The indemnity received from the Sino-Japanese war further alleviated the financial difficulty. Also, the government realized that the foreign powers
would not agree to revise the treaties if her legal system remained feudal. Thus, a modern legal system was adopted with a German pattern civil code and torture was abolished. These were successfully solved the problems faced by Meiji to a large extent. The evidence was that Britain was willing to give up her extra-territorial right in 1894. By 1899, all foreigners were attained with the end of the unequal treaties.

To tackle the technological and military backwardness, Japan learned from the West. Foreign experts were imported and government was willing to develop heavy industries. Thus, heavy industries like shipbuilding, iron and steel industry were well-developed. Railways and telecom were constructed. On the other hand, Japan adopted the conscription law and the army was modernized upon the German model. As a result, the army was well-equipped with western weapons. It contributed to the victories of Sino-Japanese war and Russo-Japanese war. All these showed that Japan was no longer technologically and militarily backward. The problems were apparently solved.

Furthermore, the education development was not well developed during the rule under the Tokugawa Shogunate and thus, the illiteracy rate was quite high. In order to civilize Japanese, Emperor Meiji established the ministry of Education and compulsory primary education to get rid of illiteracy. Girl schools were also established. As a result, 95% Japanese were studying in primary schools. It also provided skilled labours and professionals for other reforms.

Most importantly, Japan had a low international status before and was regarded as inferior. She signed several unequal treaties with the foreign countries including Treaty of Edo. These humiliating treaties were the obstacle for Japan to achieve equal footing with the West. They also caused discontent among the Japanese.

To achieve a higher international status, Japan had to end the unequal treaties first. She strengthened her military power and won two war, Sino-Japanese war and Russo-Japanese war. This surprised the Western countries as Japan won the two big kingdoms. The Anglo-Japanese Alliance further showed that Japan had achieved equality with the Western powers.

In fact, there was once the division in the government. Saigo and Itagaki advocated overseas expansion in the 1870s while Iwakura, Ito and Okuma suggested modernization before external expansion. Yet, it was solved when the war party was defeated and resigned from the government.

In conclusion, there were several problems that Emperor Meiji faced. Yet, to a certain extent, these problems were solved by the Meiji Modernization reform. Japan was even rise to a world power at the end of the Meiji era.