

Does the great reform
act deserve its title



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In 1832, parliament passed an act changing the way M. P. s were elected and the way Parliament was run, this resulted significant changes. The act was designed to “ take effectual measures for correcting diverse abuses that have long prevailed in the choice of members to serve in the commons house of Parliament”. In this essay I will assess the changes and come to a conclusion as to whether the act was a great reform.

Before 1832, there was a huge need for reform because the situation had been unchanged since the 1680's. Due to the change in the population and economy of Britain because of the Industrial Revolution the constituencies had become very unequal. The vast majority of people didn't have a vote, only 1 in 20 adult males could vote before the reform. Voting was done publicly, there were no secret ballots and a lot of voting was rigged or people had been bribed.

The Great Reform Act changed who was allowed to vote. Before the reform, a man had to have a property worth $\geq \frac{1}{2}20$ to be able to vote. After the reform, people could vote if they owned or rented land or property worth $\geq \frac{1}{2}10$ or more. This increased the number of people voting from approx. 1 in 20 to 1 in 7 adult males. It reduced the number of rotten boroughs (boroughs that had the right to elect an M.

P. but had few voters) and pocket boroughs (boroughs that are controlled by the money of an M. P.) and took some power away from the House of Lords, giving more power to the House of Commons. The problems that were not sorted out by the Great Reform Act were that ballots were still not secret.

Due to more people being involved, there was actually a rise in bribery. Rotten and pocket boroughs still existed and many constituencies were completely different in size. This was unfair on the bigger constituencies. Even after the reform act, there were 35 constituencies with less than 300 votes while a big city like Liverpool had over 11, 000. Overall, I believe the “Great” Reform Act was a step in the right direction but was by no means great, Many things had only just improved or were no better, women still didn’t have a vote, there were still no secret ballots, true more people were able to vote but that also led to more people being bribed, more power should have been taken away from the house of lords, ability to vote relied on ownership of land and wealth etc. It would slowly get better but the changes made in 1832 should have been made years ago, they were behind the times.

However, you need to look back on it as a small, but bold, step that would eventually end up as the democracy that we now live in. At the time, it was probably all that was possible considering that they were taking the power of the wealthy away.