

Essay on the liberal party

[Life](#), [Home](#)



\n[[toc title="Table of Contents"](#)]\n

\n \t

1. [Background](#) \n \t
2. [Highlights of Liberal Party between 1910 and 1914](#) \n \t
3. [The People's Budget](#) \n \t
4. [An Overwhelming Electoral Win](#) \n \t
5. [National Insurance Act and Labour Movement](#) \n \t
6. [Irish Home Rule](#) \n \t
7. [Women Suffrage](#) \n \t
8. [The Decline](#) \n \t
9. [References:](#) \n

\n[/toc]\n \n

We are focused on the Liberal Party of the UK in this write-up. The direction of our lens will be on the challenges faced by the party during the years 1910 to 1914.

Background

The Liberal Party of the UK was created by the merger of the Old Whigs Party and the Radicals group. The new Liberal Party was very interested in crushing absolute monarchism where the parliament and constitution draws power from the Crown; it would rather want the reverse as the case (Greenleaf). This pitched it in the opposition for a very long time and was only able to taste power for the first time in 1830; an avenue it had to formulate policies in line with its ideologies.

It was no surprise that the Liberal Party introduced several reforms to the

political system of the UK at that time. The very first was the First Reform Act passed into law in 1832 which extended voting rights to more men, then came the Second Reform Act that passed the House of Commons but then had a good majority of Liberals but got rejected at the House of Lords which faced fierce public protests for the non-passage of the bill (Petter). So, when the Third Reform Act was sent to it from the House of Commons, the Lords had little choice, amidst the Crown's mandate, than allow it to pass and forestall fresh protest. The Third Reform Act took away parliamentary seats from rotten boroughs, which helped the anti-reform politicians win elections, and gave the same voting rights to countryside residents just as their city resident counterparts.

William Gladstone was one of the greatest Liberals that ruled as Prime Minister and the party's leader, coming to power in 1868 (Conservapedia.com). During his tenure, Gladstone pursued financial policies centred on a balanced budget, laissez faire and low taxes to improve the lot of the middle class. Gladstone's welfare policies were enjoyed by various groups including; children who benefitted from his Elementary Education Act of 1870 and peasant Catholics in Ireland who were given the right to vote like any city dweller through the Third Reform Act, a move that eventually brought about the demand for Irish Home Rule after the Irish Parliamentary Party was set-up.

Highlights of Liberal Party between 1910 and 1914

The coming back to power of the Liberal Party in 1906 enabled it to push for more liberal policies. Some of the new policies are the National Insurance Law, regulation of working hours, and other workers' welfare regulation

(Clarke). Another milestone move of the Asquith-led government of Liberals is the People's Budget produced in 1909 which became a subject of political bickering and caused the Liberal Party's popularity to dwindle. The Liberal Party was quick to recognize this and sought to hold on to power by; promoting workers' welfare in order to gain the support of Labour which already has a growing movement, and champion the cause of a fairly independent Ireland with its Irish Home Rule bill to gain Irish support and remain in power.

The People's Budget

The budget of 1909 proposed by the liberal government of Asquith was promoted to change the tax system of the UK in order to 'eliminate' poverty by increasing taxes so that the liberal government will have more money to fund its welfare programmes. This was met by a stiff opposition from the Conservatives which were the majority in the House of Lords and were land owners who believed that the budget would devalue their assets. A division was then created in the polity and a political battle ensued. The strong political battle that resulted led to the Act of Parliament that checkmated the powers of the Lords in blocking legislation. Also, the rising cost of running government resulting from the welfare programs of the Liberals compelled the Crown to require the government to call two general elections in 1910 so that its position will be validated and its popularity tested. This was a real test of Liberal Party's popularity because it then discovered that it has lost a lot of followers, it then associated with Labour movements. Some of the highlights of these years are briefly explained below.

An Overwhelming Electoral Win

After losing a hold on power at the expiration of Gladstone's tenure in the late 1890s, the Liberal Party was again elected into power in 1906 with a landslide victory.

National Insurance Act and Labour Movement

This Act was passed in 1911 to improve the lot of employees in the event of illness, job loss and in retirement. The necessary contribution was made both by the employee and his employer. Labour movement arose to wrestle the government on some points of the welfare program that they believed was taking their wages away from them by the 7s 6d wages covered under the new law.

Irish Home Rule

Prime Minister Asquith needed support in some way after realising his Liberal Party had lost many loyalists in the general elections of 1910, so he turned to get support from the Irish and labour. The Irish Home Rule Law, an Act of parliament, came into force in 1914 after getting parliamentary consent, though not at first instance. It is on record that the first bill supported by William Gladstone was rejected at the House of Common while the second scaled through the Commons but was crushed by the Conservative-filled House of Lords. This third presentation of the bill was able to scale through the hurdles because of the reduced power of the House of Lords that was achieved in 1911, the Parliament Act. Irish Home Rule gave the right of home government to Ireland but was never implemented because of the

outbreak of World War I. A new law was passed in 1920 called, The Government of Ireland Act.

Women Suffrage

Good to note here, in brief, are the activities of the Asquith-led Liberal Party government which was opposed to women suffrage, though against his Party's majority wishes. The various women groups that have risen up since the Reform Act of 1832 reduced the voting rights of women continued but recorded limited victory. Thus Asquith suffered attacks from these groups and their supporters.

The Decline

The break out of World War I in 1914 is accorded by some historians as what tore the Liberal Party apart completely, having to face a war that was not prepared for and combining it with the growing home front resentments. Though partially true, the Liberal Party had suffered many internal party strives before the war (Dangerfield).

The Defence of the Realm Act⁶ passed into law in the early weeks of the onset of World War I was seen as illiberal by many Liberal faithfuls, the laissez faire Liberals as well and the party was further drawn to the opposite sides by factions (Laybourn). The coalition government formed by Asquith in the war times could be regarded as well as one of the contributors to the implosion of the Liberal Party which lost power to the Conservatives-backed Lloyd George in 1916.

References:

- Greenleaf, W. H. The British Political Tradition. Volume II: The Ideological Heritage. London: Methuen. 1983.
- Petter, Martin. History, The Progressive Alliance. The Journal of the Historical Association
- " The British Liberal Party". Conservapedia. com.
- Clarke, P. F. " The electoral position of the Liberal Parties, 1910-1914". The English Historical Review
- Dangerfield, George. The Strange Death of Liberal England: 1910-1914. New Brunswick: Transaction Publishers. 2011.
- Laybourn, Keith. " The Rise of Labour and the Decline of Liberalism: The State of the Debate" Wiley. com.