

Representation and  
democracy in britain,  
1830-1931 essay  
sample



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## Public Pressure (External to Parliament)

- \* Alliance between the middle and working classes; various political clubs/organisations had been formed.
- \* Radical Reform Association (Cobbett and Hunt), Cartwright founded Hampden clubs beginning in 1811 and spreading around the country. By 1817 there were 40 Hampden Clubs in the Lancashire cotton district.
- \* 1830, Thomas Attwood formed the General Political Union (Birmingham Political Union); The National Political Union also founded. Cobbett also founded the Political Register with a circulation of c. 200, 000 which provided a link between far flung supporters of reform and a largely London based readership.
- \* There was also the Reformist's Register, the Black Dwarf, The Republican. These publications not only sought political reform but also a free press.
- \* London radicalism, two rival organisations set up 1830-2; National Union of Working Classes (April 1831) led by Lovett and Hetherington agitating for universal male suffrage. National Political Union middle class for householder franchise.
- \* Large public meetings/demonstrations occurred from 1815 onwards with reference to reform; Spa Fields (1816); March of the Blanketeers (1817); The Pentridge Rising (1817) [though this had more to do with economic circumstance]; St Peter's Fields (Manchester) otherwise known as Peterloo (1819). Cato Street Conspiracy (1820), plot to assassinate the Cabinet

- \* It is worth noting that none of these events caused the Tories to change their anti-reform stance. Much of the discontent was caused by the economic downturn following the ending of the Napoleonic Wars and the demobilisation of c. 300,000 soldiers and sailors.
- \* 1829 harvest failure creating high prices; August 1830-December 1831 saw the hayrick burnings (Swing riots) assisted fears of revolution.
- \* In the north, John Doherty organised a TU for cotton spinners; strikes broke out in Manchester (1830) in protest to wage reductions. Miners sought to join Doherty's union. Tricolour flags seen on the Liverpool-Manchester railway.
- \* Following rejection of a franchise bill in July 1831 there were riots in some parts of the country, e. g. Bristol.
- \* The fall of Charles X of France; failed to listen to the demands of the people; had used heavy-handed rule and failed to recognise genuine electoral grievances.
- \* Catholic emancipation had been successfully introduced.
- \* Henry Brougham had won a well-publicised victory in the 1830 General Election (Yorkshire) over parliamentary reform.
- \* 1831 General Election produced massive pro-reform majority. In almost all constituencies where voting was open enough to test propertied public opinion reformers swept the board.

\* Only counties of Shropshire and Buckinghamshire returned two anti-reforming Tories; c. 30 of the 82 English county members had declared against reform March/April 1831 - only 6 returned at the election

#### Internal Parliamentary Pressures

\* The break up of Liverpool's apparently unchallengeable anti-reformist government over religious reform (emancipation of Catholics)

\* There was also political in-fighting for the succession to Liverpool (Canning, pro RC emancipation v Protestants led by Wellington and supported by Peel, Westmorland, Melville, Eldon and Bathurst who refused to serve under Canning).

\* This ministry was followed by Goderich's (lasted 5 months) and then Wellington. The disarray of the Tories gave the Whigs a genuine opportunity.

\* Canningites resigned from Wellington's government (Palmerston, Dudley, Grant, Lamb, Huskinson) and formed a pro-reform alliance with the Whigs.

\* Whigs had been in opposition from 1807-1830; Grey keen on reform to keep power; wanted both seat redistribution and extension of franchise. Significant number of Whigs were from the middle classes. Sponsored reforms in 1792, 1793 and 1797.

#### Removal of forces against change

\* Liverpool's stroke meant Tories were in disarray, death of George III (1830)

1867

### Public Pressure (external to Parliament)

\* Alliance between middle and working classes, various political pressure groups; Chartism (1830's and 40's); Northern Reform Union; Manhood Suffrage and Vote by Ballot Association (1862); National Reform League (1864) - by 1867 membership stood at 65, 000 in 600 branches; Reform Union.

\* Garibaldi's visit in 1864, Civil War in USA, riots in Hyde Park (1866)

\* Meetings of the Reform League in the north attracted over 100, 000 people.

\* Agrarian distress, Sheffield trade union outrages (1866), rise of organised Trade Unions.

\* Economic downturn - collapse of Thames ship building industry; banking failures such as Overend and Gurney;

\* Cheap provincial press (stamp duty repealed 1855/61) e. g. Leeds Mercury, Newcastle Chronicle

### Other Factors

\* Population change, since 1832, population had risen from 24 m - 29m. The adult population (Eng/Wales) was over 5 million but only 20% could vote.

\* The distribution of population had changed. Industrial areas were expanding rapidly but there was no recognition of this in seat distribution.

### Internal Parliamentary Pressures

\* Real pressure from the left (e. g. John Bright; Foster and Stansfield). Russell had introduced reform in 1832 and had attempted to do so in 1852.

Gladstone believed in the moral case for reform.

\* Liberals in disarray, Palmerston's supporters refused to join the government providing a real opportunity for the Tories. Disraeli keen to find a way to gain favour with the public. Tories had only enjoyed two brief periods of power since 1846 (1852 and 1859).

### Removal of forces against change

\* Death of Palmerston (1865) who was resolutely against reform

1884

### Public Pressure (external to Parliament)

\* Little external pressure, 1884 result of internal pressure from Westminster

### Internal Parliamentary Pressures

\* Joseph Chamberlain, for the mass of forward looking Liberals who identified themselves more or less with the view expressed by Chamberlain in January 1883, the Liberals were 'ripe for a new departure in constructive Radicalism' after the sterile futilities of the Irish diversion. The franchise extension of 1884 was to be the 'herald of far reaching changes in the elemental structure of society'.

\* The new electorate would be the means to the end of what, by 1885, was codified as the Radical programme. This meant better housing, heavier death duties, rating reform, payment of MPs, Church Disestablishment, free elementary education, allotments to farm labourers, restoration of illegally enclosed common land, a progressive income tax and a greater emphasis on direct taxes. There would be reform of and greater powers for local government and a general reduction in the power of government.

\* 1867 had created illogical arrangements which had no claim to 'finality' and which made further change irresistible. Chamberlain wanted to achieve some really radical advances. He needed to rally the Liberal Party after a quiet administration dogged by problems in Ireland and in foreign policy.

1918

Public Pressure (external to Parliament)

Women

\* Increasing education for middle/upper class women including opportunities to become doctors and other professions.

\* London Society for Women's Suffrage founded 1867. Various regional societies amalgamated into the NSWS (National Society for Women's Suffrage 1872).

\* Founding of the WSPU (1903); variety of activities including attacks on property (throwing stones through the windows of London clubs; attempting

to set fire to ministers' country houses (e. g. Lloyd George's house in 1913); battling police outside of Parliament (Nov 1910).

\* Slashing the Rokeby Venus in the National Gallery (1912); Emily Davidson killing herself by throwing herself in front of the King's horse at the 1913 Derby; boycotting the 1911 census; refusing to pay taxes.

\* Production of suffrage newspapers e. g. The Women's Suffrage Journal (1870-), Votes for Women (1907-).

\* Women had made significant legal progress e. g. Married Woman's Property Act (1875); single women rate payers allowed to vote in municipal elections (1869) and could be elected to school boards and become Poor Law guardians;

\* They could vote in county council elections (1888) and stand for county councils 1907; could be elected to parish, rural district and urban district councils 1895.

\* Women involved with political parties; Tories formed the Primrose League 1883 (50% women by 1890's). Women's Liberal Federation founded 1887 (43, 000 members by 1893).

\* Many other countries (including parts of the Empire) had granted women's suffrage (incl. New Zealand, Australia; ½ Finland, Denmark, Norway, Canada [except Quebec], and USA (ratified in 1920).

Men



- \* There was increased education for men. If they moved up the economic scale then they would receive the vote.
  
- \* However, early twentieth century was a time of industrial agitation; syndicalist movement, 41 million working days lost in 1912; economic depression; the rise in New Unionism since 1890's; government being involved in armed conflict v strikers (e. g. Glasgow 1912); growing awareness of socialism and communism in Europe.
  
- \* TU movement increased from c. 1 million (1867) to 4 million (1914) and was now financing the Labour Party.
  
- \* Working class men were being elected to Parliament; some (Keir Hardie, Ramsay MacDonald, Philip Snowden) had originally applied to the Liberal Party but on being refused had turned to the emerging Labour movement.
  
- \* In Europe, Russia had seen an aborted attempt at revolution in 1905.
  
- \* Upper/middle class men fought alongside working class in the trenches; by 1918 accepted that there should be universal male suffrage.
  
- \* TUs also showed a responsible attitude at home; pre-war militancy died down during the war.

## World War I

- \* Without any doubt a critical influence on the timing of this act. This had the effect of acting as both an accelerator and a catalyst for changing views.

## Internal Parliamentary Pressures

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## Women

\* Liberal government (1906-) believed to be more sympathetic than Tories.

Lloyd George known to be in favour.

\* Succession of parliamentary bills brought forward by backbenchers 1908-11. In H of C, majority voted in favour of women gaining the vote 1912/13.

\* NUWSS supported Labour with a fighting fund and a number of Liberals lost by elections 1911-14 as a result.

\* Speaker's Conference (1916) made up from all parties and came to an agreement to extend the franchise (though there was to be much debate on the way it was to be given to women).

\* Lord Curzon, member of the Coalition government and President of the League Opposing Woman Suffrage encouraged peers to abstain from voting if they couldn't support the 1918 bill.

## Men

\* Liberal and Labour Parties were in favour of universal male suffrage.

\* A series of compromises including the retention of plural voting brought the Tories on board (the Tories also believed that military service was likely to influence working class males to vote Tory!).

## Removal of forces against change

## Women

- \* WWI was critical in changing attitudes towards both men and women. To assist the war effort, over 7.5 million women were employed (just under 6 million pre-war).
- \* Most of the new recruits were middle/upper class women. Moreover, women proved that in a whole variety of areas they were able to take over men's jobs whether as munition workers, the land army, transport workers including drivers (2,500 by 1917), police (first appearance by women during war, most forces had women's division by 1916).
- \* Armed Forces (Women's Army Auxiliary Corps (1917) followed by the two other services; etc.
- \* The WSPU suspended suffrage activities to support the war effort (Aug 1914). WSPU placed its organisations and its funds at the disposal of the government.
- \* The war allowed a number of hostile MP's (including Asquith) to climb down from their untenable position of opposing women's suffrage.
- \* Coalition government meant a decline in importance of party divisions and offered the prospect of all party agreement.
- \* Conservatives recognised that universal male suffrage was inevitable and that some of the possible impact of increased working class male votes could be dissipated by middle and upper class women's votes.

\* The contribution made by women was widely recognised and broke down barriers so that by December 1916 it was accepted that all women 30 years old and above would get the vote.

1928

Public Pressure (external to Parliament)

\* None

Internal Parliamentary Pressures

\* In 1924 Baldwin had promised to equalise male and female qualifications.

Removal of forces against change

\* General election performances of the three parties 1918-24 probably allayed political fears (especially of Tories)

B (i) To what extent were the Franchise Reform acts turning points in the development of Britain as a democracy?

(ii) To what extent did each Reform Act change or consolidate the existing system?

1832

What it didn't change

\* No shorter parliaments

\* No secret ballot

- \* No constituencies of the same size
- \* No payment of MP's
- \* No manhood suffrage
- \* Hefty property qualification on MP's
- \* Same parties (Whigs and Tories) vied for supremacy
- \* Many seats still controlled by aristocratic patronage (c. 70 seats)
- \* Striking how little the social composition of MP's changed, 267/658 MP's in 1847 were sons of peers
- \* The Chandos amendment added 130,000 tenant farmers and this extended the power of the aristocracy.
- \* In 1841 32/44 parishes owned by one man in South Lincolnshire all tenants voted for the preferred candidate.

#### What it did change

- \* Substantially more seats fought over than previously 188/254 [74% normally nearer 40%]; note that this enthusiasm did drop but the average was still c. 60%
- \* In Scotland voters increased from c. 4,000 to 65,000 (1/8th adult male population)

- \* Elections in Scotland (1826) had meant that not one seat had been contested.
- \* In Ireland, Catholic Emancipation and parliamentary reform increased electorate from 26, 000 to 61, 000.
- \* Voters now needed to be on an electoral register - parties had to respond leading to appearance of agents and the beginning of professionalising politics.
- \* Increasingly difficult for an MP to be labelled ' independent'
- \* Reform a triumph for H of C against Lords and monarch who feared reform
- \* Function of General Elections began to change. Since 1714, no general election had resulted in a change of government (monarch had final say).
- \* From 1832 all understood that purpose of a general election was to choose a government. In 1841 it was the first time in over 100 years that a government with a working majority was replaced by another through the verdict of the people.
- \* Passing of 1832 created the culture of reform responding to public pressure. E. g. 1832 gave a majority for the abolition of slavery; other reforms = Municipal Corporations Act 1835, reform of the Poor Law, county police forces, church reforms etc.
- \* MP's now had more work to do and the parliamentary year expanded significantly from its previous normal maximum of 5 months.

\* The Reform Act of 1832 was passed with conservative intentions - government to remain in the hands of the great landowners. But long term there was a new relationship between government and the governed.

\* 1832 was the first and most important assault on 18th century constitution and the starting point on the road to democracy.

1867: Was it a turning point?

What didn't it change?

\* Despite the majority of new electorate being working class, they had a natural sympathy for Liberals. However, gains were limited.

\* Furthermore, there was very limited impact on selection of candidates. Liberal Party firmly middle class - attempts to get local parties to select working class candidates met with little success.

\* E. g. at by election in Bristol (1870), the Bristol Industrial, Social and Political Association of Working Men established in attempt to persuade local Liberal Party to adopt a working class man (other sitting Liberal MP was a wealthy business man, Samuel Morley). However, another leading businessman selected.

\* Same things happened elsewhere. In 1874, two working class men entered parliament from mining constituencies Thomas Burt from a Northumbrian coal-field and Alexander MacDonal leader of the miner's union [Stafford]. Even blocked working class at local government level.

- \* Therefore, the social group from which MP's selected, both in the Liberal and Conservative parties, (still c. 25% bankers, merchants and manufacturers). Landowners still dominated (though some increase in middle class professionals).
- \* The Tories offered few opportunities for working class men to advance in local government - none at all in parliament. Nor did working class Conservatives have the advantage of being members of a TU with their potential pressure.
- \* However, most working class men happy to support values of middle class - most were not motivated by class-consciousness. Gladstone regarded as a friend of the working class.
- \* The new system lasted only 17 years until 1884. It did not produce in any way 'one man one vote'.
- \* Most new voters lived in towns and not in the countryside. Most agricultural labourers didn't receive the vote until 1884.
- \* Plural voting continued: Joseph Chamberlain had 6 votes! 610,000 plural votes in 1906, 7% of the total!

What did change in representation?

- \* 7 corrupt Boroughs disfranchised completely.
- \* 45 taken from smaller Boroughs. (less than 10,000)
- \* 25 new County seats



- \* 13 seats to new Boroughs

- \* 6 given as extra seats in large Boroughs.

- \* 4 major cities, Leeds, Liverpool, Manchester and Birmingham became 3 Member constituencies, but still enormous inequalities over distribution.

- \* Constituencies could still vary enormously

- \* Average constituency size: Ireland 6,700, England 13,000, but Salisbury had 3,000 and Romford 61,000.

- \* Tiverton with a population of 10,000 had 2 MPs. Glasgow with a population of 500,000 had 2 MPs.

- \* South and East still over-represented compared with Midlands and North.

- \* Wiltshire and Dorset had a total of 25 MPs for a population of 450,000.

- \* West Riding of Yorkshire had 22 MPs for a population of 2 million.

- \* Still 140 constituencies where there were less than 2000 voters. Much of this changed after 1885 redistribution when seats were redistributed to the north.

What did it change in the electorate?

- \* Compared to 1832 the expansion in those eligible to vote was huge.

- \* Increase in England and Wales boroughs by c. 134% and in counties by 46% (83% overall).

\* In Ireland the electorate increased threefold; Scotland increase lower than England. But overall about 1/5th of adult males could vote [1.36 m to 2.46m voters].

\* Voting became more of a right than a privilege.

\* Majority of borough electors were working class. A number of industrial boroughs now had clear working class majorities.

\* The 1867 Act brought substantial working class majorities to the electoral registers of almost all the Boroughs. E. g. ten-fold increase in number of voters in Merthyr, six-fold in Oldham, five-fold in Halifax, Stoke, Blackburn and Bolton, four-fold in Leeds and three-fold in Birmingham.

What did it change in political parties and politics?

\* Parties now had to be much more professional - major emphasis on building grass roots support (J. E. Gorst for the Tories), retain and increase membership (picnics, trips etc)

\* MP's had to show commitment to the Party (though wrong to suggest a whipping system as powerful as today).

\* Number of votes lost in Parliament by government fell from 10-15/yr to 1 or 2/year.

\* Increase in local press (numbers of papers and influence at literacy rates grew [ $<400$  1858;  $> 900$  in 1844])

\* Party leaders presented ideas directly to the public.

\* Verdict of people increasingly accepted; Disraeli resigned after 1868 election before H of C met.

\* Numbers of candidates elected unopposed fell dramatically [368/658 in 1859; only 43 in 1885].

\* 1867 led directly to Secret Ballot Act (1872):

\* Secret Ballot Act 1872 introduced secret ballot and started to end corruption that had typified 19th century elections. NB long term impact on Ireland.

\* Corrupt Practices Act (1883). 1880 election - candidates declared  $\pounds 1,128$  expenses in county seats and  $\pounds 1,212$  in boroughs. Overall cost exceeded  $\pounds 2$ m.

\* Agents managed voters by throwing money at them. In Macclesfield, 55% of electorate took bribes (5, 200).

\* This act allowed a candidate only one agent and he had to take responsibility for production of expenses audit. Max stipulated ( $\pounds 710$  for 2,000 electors and  $\pounds 40$  for each additional 1000). Prescribed stiff penalties (jail) for wrong-doing.

#### 1884 Third Reform Act

\* Redistribution allowed suburban Conservatism to flourish. Tories did win increasing share of middle class vote. Much of this occurred without Tories making much of an effort.

\* Middle class alarmed at increasingly radical tone of Gladstonian Liberalism.

Middle class believed Tories would do more to check advance of working class than Liberals.

\* Disraeli's appeal to patriotism also attracted middle class support. As middle class became wealthier, so they moved into the suburbs, became less attached to their nonconformist past of their parents, identified more with the landed classes.

1884

The Bill: February 1884

\* Household suffrage in Boroughs

\*  $\frac{1}{2}$  property qualification in Counties

\* Uniform householder and lodger franchise in every Borough and County

\* Women's votes and Proportional Representation amendments rejected, Tories rejected simple Franchise Bill by 59 votes in Lords. They realised the dangers for them of county extension without redistribution. I. e. the 'absolute effacement of the Tory Party', so Tories demanded a Redistribution Bill. Peers v the people?

1884/5 Redistribution Act/1884 Third Reform Act

What did it change?

Reform Act

- \* Ended the anomaly of 1867 that borough franchise allowed working class to vote but county franchise did not.
- \* Single MP constituencies. Bad for Liberals in that they could no longer put forward a Radical and a Whig.
- \* 2.5 million voters added. Electorate now 5.5m
- \* Irish system brought into line with English
- \* Ireland votes increased three-fold (mainly nationalists)
- \* Removal of many multi-member constituencies presented a problem for the parties. 321 sitting MPs in 1885 didn't return to the new H of C (85 Liberals were defeated).
- \* New Liberals were disproportionately journalists, lawyers and doctors.
- \* Granting of the vote to farm labourers forced parties to develop new ways of reaching rural voters. Tories traditionally stronger in countryside. Liberals used to win through Whig landowners.
- \* Liberals tended to rely on missionary work from towns with mobile vans bringing speakers and leaflets and lantern shows. Primrose League used cycling clubs.
- \* Liberals gave more attention to rural issues. Joseph Chamberlain one of the first to raise the issue of land reform - state help for farm labourers to acquire small holdings (Unauthorised Programme) rejected by Gladstone.

- \* 1885 General Election - Liberals secured a number of rural seats.

- \* Tories also gave rural issues their attention - Elected county councils introduced in 1888; Allotments Act 1887, Small Holdings Act 1892.

#### 1884/85 Redistribution Act

- \* Boroughs < 15,000 lost 2 MP's (79) < 50,000 lost 1 MP (36)

- \* 150 small borough seats extinguished

- \* Counties got 97 new seats (all Conservative in 1885).

- \* Boroughs got 37 new seats

- \* Cities got 39 new seats

- \* 142 seats redistributed in all. Only 83 seats unaffected by this redistribution. Vast rings of suburban constituencies sprawled about the major cities. Villa Toryism

- \* No more 3 member constituencies though still 24 x 2 MP Boroughs.

- \* This was serious for Liberals who were unable to field a Whig and a Radical and would put an end to Whig / Radical co operation.

- \* Created 89 seats which had a clear majority of working class electors (of real benefit to Labour in long run). However, other factors had to come into play before these became Labour seats.

- \* A small number of university seats and city seats remained as multi member seats.
  - \* In Ireland these changes strengthened Parnell's hand.
  - \* 45% of adult males still had no vote due to the lack of the one year residence qualification.
  - \* Counties and Boroughs placed on an equal footing. In Counties and Boroughs an MP represented c. 53, 000.
  - \* Pre 1885 the disproportion between the largest and smallest constituencies was 252: 1, now 8: 1.
  - \* Redistribution favoured the Tories - the electoral hegemony of the Tories 1886-1997 owed much to the political cynicism of Salisbury (led to Villa Toryism).
  - \* Tories made significant gains in large urban areas (Salisbury's insistence!). Towns divided by class lines - managed to win seats in Lib heartlands of the industrialised areas. (NB see party organization for effects on political parties).
  - \* North was much stronger electorally.
- ' The redistribution of 1885 marked a major watershed in the development of the British electoral system. It involved largely sweeping away the traditional pattern in which constituencies had covered very large geographical areas and in which most counties and boroughs had returned two, three, or even

four members. All boroughs with a population below 15,000 lost their seat; and new seats were allocated for units of population over 50,000. This involved the division of most counties and many boroughs...this meant creating socially homogeneous communities.' Pugh.

What it didn't change

- \* No new principles
- \* No manhood suffrage (2/5th - 2/3rd of adult male population had vote).
- \* Only c. 95 of constituencies were working class by 1900.
- \* By 1914 Britain still possessed one of the most restricted franchises in western Europe.
- \* Size of constituencies still not uniform. Largest difference was 8x bigger than smallest (had been 250x)

1918

What did it change?

- \* Gave all men over 21 (with 6 months residential qualification) the vote (increase from 60% to 95%). Increased male voters from 8m - 13m (no property qualification at all).
- \* All women over the age of 30 (householders) about 8.4m voters. I. e. wives and mothers, but no munitionettes and no 'flappers'.



- \* Plural votes limited to a maximum of two (for residence and business premises or residence and university residence).
- \* Major redistribution of seats and re-drew the electoral map of GB.
- \* Creation of uniform, single member constituencies of c. 70, 000 inhabitants
- \* Elections made cheaper - expenses of the returning officer to be paid from public funds.
- \* Same day voting
- \* Largest ever increase in the electorate (about 250% increase), total vote c. 21. 4m.
- \* 1919: First woman MP Nancy Astor for Plymouth (Husband's seat)
- \* 1922: 33 women parliamentary candidates, (69, 4% in 1929), 8 women in the Commons.
- \* 1929 first woman cabinet minister (Margaret Bondfield), 14 women MPs out of 615
- \* It led to further acts to remove discrimination of women e. g. 1919 Sex Disqualification Removal Act; 1923 Matrimonial causes Act; Guardianship of Infants Act; Widows' Pensions Act
- \* May have led to major redistribution of political power (see Decline of Liberals notes for debate!)

\* Briefly, problems for Liberals caused by electoral system, they were caught between property and working class vote.

\* Concentration of Labour vote with c. 4m new voters enfranchised. Liberals came third in 1922.

\* Liberals still gained 5.3m votes in 1929 but only won 59 seats (Lab 8.3m votes = 288 seats)

What didn't it change?

\* Women still not properly represented by gender in House of Commons (first and only woman Prime Minister 1979).

\* House of Commons still overwhelmingly dominated by landed and professional classes.

1928 Equal Franchise Act

\* Female Suffrage granted on the same basis as for men. The 'flapper vote'. 2m more women voters than men. Plural voting remained.

2: How did electoral changes affect political parties?

What were the consequences to the party system post-1867?

\* There were of course consequences for political parties after the 1832 act but these are covered in the section relevant to 1832 as a turning point.

\* For political parties, 1867 represents a watershed in terms of having to become far more organized and professional.

\* In this section there is a need to analyze the Liberal and Conservative parties together. The Labour party is not formed until 1900 although there are some similarities with the other two.

### Party Organisation

\* With a larger electorate, Parties had to work harder to win votes. It was the job of the Parties to ensure that their voters were on the register. Very few lodgers could get on without the backing of a political party. The registration system cost money and few working class voters could do it alone.

\* Bribery was less possible and so much reduced, although it continued on a large scale until after the Corrupt Practices Act of 1883. There were 22 successful petitions for bribery after the 1868 election. Trollope at Beverley: 30% of the voters were bribable.

\* There were too many voters to bribe! So politicians had to start to explain and justify their policies to the electorate.

\* The concept of a 'general election' now developing, e. g. Gladstone's Midlothian Campaigns in 1880.

\* MPs were speaking in each other's constituencies and there was a new respect and concern for voters.

\* Salisbury to Victoria 1887: 'the duty of making speeches is an aggravation of the labours of your majesty's servants which we owe entirely to Mr. Gladstone'.

\* The provincial and national press reported political speeches. NB 1855 abolition of Stamp Tax and 1861 repeal of paper duty

The TIMES: 1851 5d 40, 000 copies

1861 3d 70, 000 copies

\* 1880 may be seen as the first 'modern' election (Pugh). 5/6ths of the seats were contested.

\* New 3 member constituencies e. g. Birmingham and Leeds created the need for party organisation on a new scale. Need to spread votes evenly between three candidates.

\* Party politics became the absorbing national passion, e. g. 1882 Iolanthe (G & S)

...every boy and every gal, that's born into the world alive, is either a little Liberal, or else a little Conservative!

\* There were party associations in the constituencies.

Conservative

\* Disraeli: 'The Tory party has resumed its natural functions in the government of the country. For what is the Tory Party unless it represents national feeling?'

\* 1863 National Registration Association

\* 1864 Junior Carlton Club

- \* National Union of Conservative Associations

- \* Conservative Central Office

- \* John Gorst appointed as national party organiser. This was recognition by Disraeli that the Conservatives needed to act after the defeat of 1868. 60% of Tory seats were in counties, so great need to look after them.

- \* Gorst recognised Tory weakness in the Boroughs and set up National Federations and central party bureaucracies e. g. Central Conservative Office.

- \* There were 420 local Conservative Associations by 1874. Of 74 Eng and Welsh constituencies where Conservatives won seats in 1874, 65 had Conservative Associations.

- \* There was much more careful selection of candidates and publication of 'Hints for Candidates'.

- \* Concern over local elections led to large local meetings held e. g. Powderham Castle in Devon c. 25, 000 attended. More effort put into the press after 1855 stamp tax and 1861 paper duties ended. But there were not enough TORY papers.

- \* In 1873 Mudford was appointed editor of the Standard which became very much a Conservative paper. By 1874 the Morning Post moving to Conservatives.

Party organisations

\* 'Social life began to be organised upon Party lines.' Read

\* Thousands of Liberal and Conservative clubs formed. E. g. by 1907

Keighley had 13 Conservative clubs. There were excursions, picnics, bands and football clubs.

\* In 1900, 600 Salford Liberals picnicked at Matlock Bath. There were Venetian fetes on rivers and canals!

\* The Primrose League formed in 1883 was particularly strong in rural areas, giving all classes a role and the chance for working class to mix with higher classes. It had reading rooms, lectures, billiards, friendly societies and organised social clubs, outings, picnics and excursions.

By 1891 = 1 million members

By 1910 = 2 million members

\* 1865 Birmingham Liberal Association was founded and was reorganised in 1868. It had very tight control of voters in 3 seat constituency meant that Liberals won all three seats in Birmingham.

\* 1877: National Liberal Association formed and affiliation of local parties to it

\* Both parties had election agents and careful registration of voters (NB 3 Member constituencies). They organised objections to other parties' electors.

Social composition of the Parties

## Liberals

- \* Lib-Labs, first two working class MP's entered 1874 for mining constituencies (T. Burt and A. Macdonald. [Morpeth and Stafford] ).
- \* There was a relative fall in the strength of the Whig element. Radical element c. 80 in 1880 (one third). Most were artisans, shopkeepers and small businessmen.

## Conservatives

- \* Increasing numbers. of representatives from commercial and business classes who had tended to be Liberal before. Start of the move to the right of such classes.
- \* Agricultural vote remained however, the key element of Conservative support.

40% Conservative MPs Landowners

28% Commerce

22% Professional and public servants

- \* NB vote did not polarise on class lines until well into 20th Century.

## Labour

- \* A consequence of the Conservative domination of politics between 1886 and 1905 was the decision to form the Labour Representative Committee (1900) from the various strands of the Labour movement.

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- \* This became the Labour Party which fought its first election in 1905.
  - \* After the legal recognition of the Trade Unions in 1868, the tactic employed by the TUC was to try to influence the existing political parties rather than to try to establish an independent working class party.
  - \* Whilst there seemed to be political parity between the Liberals and Conservatives this tactic seemed to be working with a number of concessions won from Gladstone and Disraeli.
  - \* The split in the Liberal Party (1886) meant that apart from a brief period (1892-5), Britain appeared to be a period of one party dominating Westminster.
  - \* Furthermore, the domination of the Liberal Party by a small number of businessmen who refused to countenance working class candidates meant that there was a demand for greater political activity amongst trade unionists.
  - \* A series of legal decisions convinced the TU movement of the need for greater political action. Amongst these were *Temperton v Russell* (1893), *Lyons v Wilkins* (1896) and, greatest of all, *Taff Vale* (1901). These judgements undermined the gains made through the legislation of Gladstone and Disraeli.
  - \* Even before *Taff Vale*, decision had been made to combine various socialist political organisations to form one movement. In 1900 the Labour Representation Committee formed from the Independent Labour Party, the Fabians, the Social Democratic Federation and the Trade Union movement.
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\* After Taff Vale, there was an increased willingness of TUs to affiliate to the LRC. Membership rose from 376, 000 (1901) to 998, 338 (1906).

\* Growth in TU membership would inevitably have an electoral impact in favour of Labour.

1910 Trade Unions had 2. 5 million members.

1914 Trade Unions had 4. 0 million members.

Number of socialist societies doubled between 1906 and 1914.

\* 1914-26 represented a crucial time for Labour in its struggle with the Liberals. There were over 8 million TU members. TUs affiliated to the Labour Party which gave Labour an organisational and financial base.

\* Labour leaders knew that to be over-identified with the left would mean that they would be unelectable unless they had the support of the middle class. Unless they were careful, Labour would be identified as simply the party of the TUs and the extreme left. Thus they would have to show moderation in language, tactics and membership.

Labour leaders' backgrounds

\* MacDonald had originally sought to be a Liberal candidate; Henderson had been a Liberal agent and mayor, Dalton had been a Fabian at Cambridge, Attlee had been a member of the ILP believing the Social Democratic Federation (SDF) to be too extreme.

\* In Labour's first government, 8 members of the cabinet had been to Public School including two to Harrow and two to Winchester. There were also many ex-Liberals in the 1924 administration (including Haldane, Wedgwood-Benn, and Trevelyan).

\* Leadership of Labour was in the hands of those who believed in socialism due to humanitarian and ethical reasons rather than Marxism or Leninism.

\* Like the other parties, Labour recognised the need to employ agents to support their candidates. From 1918, they also had a Labour women's movement and were the first party to have a women cabinet minister (Margaret Bondfield).

The Role of the MP:

Pre-1867 Parliament rose August to February

Changes after 1867

\* Parliamentary year getting longer, use of 'closure' to hurry business through

\* Increasing use of Whips. By 1890, Lib and Cons parties expected c. 90% of MPs to tow the party line in divisions.

How far were the parties 'democratic'?

'There is no case in history, as far as I am aware, in which a Party meeting has been summoned except to give emphasis and authority to a decision at which the Party have informally already arrived. Still less is there an example

of a vote being taken at such a meeting.' Balfour after losing the 1906 Election:

Occupations of Cabinet ministers

Pre 1868 ministers    Entrants 1868-86

Landowners    12    9

Rentiers    3    3

Civil Service    2    2

Professional    2    10

Entrepreneurs    1    5

House of Commons: Occupations of MPs

1874    1880    1885

Landowners/Rentiers    209    125    78

Army/Navy Officers    116    86    58

Professional    157    167    154

Commerce/Industry    157    259    186

Changes 1868-1910 in both Parties

Landowners down from CON 46% to 26%

LIB 26% to 7%

Industrial MPs up from CON 31% to 53%

LIB 50% to 66%

Legal / Professional CON 9% to 12%

LIB 17% to 23%

Numbers of uncontested elections

Constituencies (Total) Uncontested

1865 401 302

1868 420 212

1874 416 188

1880 416 109

1885 643 43

Balance of the Constitution:

' The balance of the constitution as a whole was little altered by the events of 1867, but the sense of greater party identity which prevailed from the late 1860's onwards markedly reduced the opportunities for exercising political discretion that still rested with the monarchy. The death of the Prince Consort and the seclusion of the widowed Queen, had already reduced the extent to which these opportunities were utilised. After 1868 there were no

occasions when the monarchy could influence the composition of ministries in the way it had done in the 1850's.' E. J. Feuchtwanger, ' Democracy and Empire'.

The size of the electorate (bold indicates the year after a franchise reform act had been passed)

1831: 435, 000

1833: 717, 000 1 in 5

1868: 1, 354, 659

1869: 2, 495, 086 1 in 3

1884: 3, 152, 453

1885: 5, 776, 000 6 in 10

1918: 7, 904, 000

1919: 21, 394, 000 60% males; 40% females

1928: 28, 000, 000

Significant statistical increases within each act

1832

In Scotland voters increased from c. 4, 000 to 65, 000 (1/8th adult male population)

In Ireland, Catholic Emancipation and parliamentary reform increased electorate from 26, 000 to 61, 000.

1867

Increase in England and Wales boroughs c. 134% and counties by 46% (89% overall).

In Ireland the electorate increased 300%. Scotland increase was lower than England.

1884

Added c. 2. 5 m voters, Ireland votes increased 300% (mainly nationalists)

1918

Increased male voters from 8m - 13m (no property qualification at all).

Most women over the age of 30 (householders), about 8. 4m voters

Largest ever increase in the electorate (about 250% increase), total vote c. 21. 4m.

Composition of the electorate

1832

Gave the middle classes the vote.

130, 000 tenant farmers given the vote (but without a secret ballot this merely increased the electoral power and influence of the aristocracy.

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1867

The majority of borough electors were working class. A number of industrial boroughs now had clear working class majorities. The Act brought substantial working class majorities to the electoral registers of almost all the Boroughs. E. g. ten-fold increase in number of voters in Merthyr, six-fold in Oldham, five-fold in Halifax, Stoke, Blackburn and Bolton, four-fold in Leeds and three-fold in Birmingham.

1884

Increased the numbers of working class men who could vote.

1918

All men over 21 and most women over 30

1928

All men and women over 21

Specimen answers to Key Questions

A. Why did it take women so long to gain the vote?

Women faced a number of intractable problems.

There were a large number of males who resolutely set their face against female suffrage purely on the grounds of male superiority (or chauvinism). Gladstone, Liberal leader from 1868 - 1893 was simply against the idea, formally opposing it in 1884. Yet the removal of Gladstone from the political

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scene still left many others who opposed women's suffrage within both major parties. These included Bonar Law (Tory), Curzon, F. E. Smith and Asquith (Liberal Prime Minister from 1908, who opposed the Conciliation Bill (1910) which would have given women householders the vote).

Other prominent figures also lent their support to opponents of the right of women to vote including Queen Victoria and Sir Almroth E Wright who wrote 'The Unexpurgated Case against Women's Suffrage'. There was even an anti-WSPU women's movement founded in 1908 by Octavia Hill (the Women's Anti Suffrage League). Throughout all major professions but particularly medicine and law, women met absolute discrimination and obstruction.

The tactics used by women's suffrage movements such as the WSPU (best described as 'direct action') raised the profile of the cause but was probably a major factor in the failure of women to get the vote. Amongst many others, the WSPU's actions included chaining themselves to railings, riots in Parliament Square (1912), setting on the Prime Minister and his colleagues (the Battle of Downing street Nov 1912), slashing pictures in the National Gallery, Emily Davidson's death at the 1913 Derby as she sought to stop the King's horse, setting fire to letter boxes, horse whipping Winston Churchill and an arson attack on Lloyd-George's house. Such actions almost certainly had a detrimental effect on the cause of women's suffrage.

There was an alienation of key sections of society. Politicians who were favourably disposed towards giving women the vote felt that they couldn't do so under duress. This included Lloyd George who believed that Christabel



Pankhurst was mad! Sympathetic newspapers (e. g. The Guardian) also withdrew overt support. Some believed that the WSPU suffered from 'diseased emotionalism'. Middle class women were alienated by their actions. By 1914 Sylvia Pankhurst had been expelled from the movement and Christabel/Emmeline were seen to be too dominant. However, there were other reasons why the WSPU proved to be unsuccessful.

The attitude of the political parties

The Liberals believed that a limited form of female suffrage embracing the top end of society could but benefit the Tories. Whilst achieving a landslide victory in 1906, the psephology of the election revealed that the margin of error, on average about 700 votes in each seat, could be undermined if wealthier women gained the vote. Yet it would be politically unacceptable to extend women's franchise to the same level as the men in one go.

The Labour Party was reluctant to support the women's cause believing that it might delay or undermine the case for universal male suffrage, a key demand of the Trade Unions.

The Liberal Party also faced many other political problems, which they considered to be more important. By 1909 they were involved in a constitutional crisis over the House of Lords which dominated proceedings until the 1911 reform. Subsequently, they had to turn their attention to Ireland which was on the brink of civil war, face the threat posed by militant trade unions with their syndicalist tendencies and the run up to war in 1914. These were huge and intractable problems and they had lost their majority in 1910. Even before the Lords crisis they were trying to pass substantial and  
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ground-breaking social legislation (e. g. Old Age Pensions). Women's suffrage was controversial and they had other priorities.

By 1914, women seemed to have lost the argument to be enfranchised. A combination of mis-placed tactics, other political priorities and male chauvinism conspired to deny them a natural right. Yet the work of the WSPU had placed women's suffrage firmly at the front of public awareness. Ironically, it was the war and the recognition of the assistance and co-operation given by women so crucial to the eventual victory together with the fundamental shift in attitude towards many walks of life engendered by the bloodiest conflict in world history that was to see women rewarded with the vote on a scale that the even the WSPU perceived to be impossible so quickly.

B. Why did it take so long to achieve universal manhood suffrage?

The desire of the Ruling Elite to maintain their power

The Great Reform Act was a product of Whig opportunism against their Conservative opponents and a need to quieten the forces of change. The limited franchise of the middle classes doubled the electorate but advanced the numbers who could vote to a mere 6% of the adult population.

The Act achieved its purpose. Middle class leaders were brought into the system and were divorced from the masses. Moreover, this was achieved at little cost to the old order. Little was altered. Corruption remained rife.

Rotten boroughs and Pocket boroughs continued. The essential safeguards of true democracy, a secret ballot and punishment for corruption, weren't

introduced until 1872 and 1883 respectively. Representation remained unequal between north and south, town and shire. The ruling elite had maintained its position at little cost.

Throughout the next 100 years, concessions were made only when they had to be made and, until 1918, the elite believed that they would concede no more. The domination of old Whigs such as Palmerston ensured no reform before 1867 (he died in 1865) and Salisbury viewed the 1884 Reform Act as the final step on the road of democracy. The composition of the House of Commons did change from land to professional but slowly; not until 1885 was there a significant drop in landed MP's. Salisbury was able to be Prime Minister in the Lords as late as 1902.

The expansion of the ruling elite to include the middle class

The middle class was as guilty as the old aristocratic class in helping to preserve the old order. Having gained the vote in 1832, they too were concerned at limiting the franchise. With the bulk of the population working class, they were concerned that manhood suffrage, demanded by the Chartist movement in the 1830's and 1840's, would result in a radical shift in power.

The granting of the vote to the top end of the working class in 1867 was once again designed to split the leaders of reform from the bulk of their followers. Once again, this tactic was successful. The National Reform League and The Reform Union were spent forces following 1867. However, the refusal to pay MP's ensured that working class men couldn't afford to

become MP's. Instead, political parties became adept at harnessing this energy through movements like the Primrose League.

The political parties' resistance to reform

The Conservative Party was the natural refuge of the ruling elite. Disraeli's 1867 Second Reform Act was accidental. He and Derby had been instrumental in rejecting a milder bill in 1866 and had introduced a bill in 1867 for pure political gain. This had been hijacked by Gladstone and John Bright. From this point on, the Tories had been as intransigent over reform as they always had been.

Whilst the Liberals had a better track record, introducing acts in 1832, 1872, 1883, 1884 and 1885, their problem was more acute at the turn of the century. Once the Trade Unions had decided to form the Labour Party, the Liberal Party recognised that manhood suffrage might potentially mean the end of themselves and were reluctant to grant it. The war proved to be the vital factor as many recognised the validity of such a case. Indeed, a similar argument can be put forward explaining the reluctance to grant female suffrage. The Liberals could see the benefits to both the Conservative and Labour parties if women gained the vote. However, as the party in government, they could see themselves being squeezed. No matter how powerful the argument being put forward, few governments have a natural desire to commit electoral suicide. However, the contribution of both the working class and women to the war effort made it impossible to halt electoral progress. Those who feared the 'leap in the dark' taken in 1867 had finally had their misgivings justified.

## The failure of revolutionary factors

In other European countries such as France and Russia, economic circumstance had acted as a catalyst to radical reform and revolution. Not so in Britain. Whilst it is true that poor economic conditions in the 1820s, 1860s and in the first ten years or so of the twentieth century had all helped to create an atmosphere that induced concessions from the political parties, nevertheless the leaders of reform failed to press home their advantage. Furthermore, the working class didn't necessarily identify franchise reform with an improvement in their living and working conditions. Instead, their priority was immediate social and welfare reform, which they believed could be achieved from within the current system. Indeed in 1868 the TUC specifically rejected the idea of a working class party but formed the Parliamentary Committee whose objective was to put pressure on both the Conservative and Liberal Parties. They did wring out a number of concessions particularly between 1868 and 1880 and it was not until the Tory dominated 1890's that the Trade Unions finally recognised that significant gain could only be made through the formation, and accession to power, of the Labour Party.

The history of Britain's progress towards democracy is one of a stout, effective rear-guard action by the ruling elite. Concessions made at the right time, the inverted snobbery of both the middle class and the upper tier of the working class ensured that politics continued to be dominated in 1900 by the men of a similar background to those who had ruled in 1800. Whilst economic depressions undoubtedly created pressure for reform throughout this period, nevertheless it was easy for the old order to divorce the leaders

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of the movements for democracy from the bulk of their supporters by limited concessions. The idea of political revolution as a method of securing better conditions didn't seriously gain support in Britain. Syndicalism and communism, prevalent on the continent at the turn of the century, gained few supporters in Britain. Britain's natural conservatism ensured that the pace of change would be sedate.