

# Britain becoming a democracy assignment



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How far was Britain a democracy by 1918 Britain was partially becoming a democracy by 1918, this was from more people gaining the vote from the new reform acts and representation of the Peoples Act. The British population also had more choice when voting from the emergence of the 3 party system which included Labour, Liberals and Conservative parties. Access to information was another reason why Britain was becoming more of a democracy as the growth of the railways meant that newspapers were more available and that the public could keep up to date with all political news.

Participation of the public meant that the public had the opportunity to become a MP from MP's now being paid which gave a greater representation of the peoples wants. Finally fairness plays a part on why Britain became more of a democracy as people could now cast a vote in private uninfluenced. The British public having the right to vote made Britain more democratic by 1918 from the 2nd reform Act of 1867, that made it possible for owners or tenants of a house valued at ? 10 were given the vote and Scottish representation of MP's was increased.

On the other plural voting was still common from voting lasting 3 weeks meaning someone could vote more than once if they had property in different counties. D. G. Wright expresses that it should not be right for someone to be about to vote twice when he says " In 1867, one man, one vote never existed in Victorian Britain, even after the third reform act". More of the British public were introduced to the franchise by the 3rd Reform Act in 1884; this gave the vote to all male householders who had a one year residency in a borough.

Also all male lodgers living in a borough room with a value of at least ? 10 could vote in counties, men owning property with an annual value of ? 5 could vote. Another thing was that counties gained 25 extra MP's and the number of voters increased by about 1, 120, 000 people. From these reform acts politicians knew that this reform act would lead to further extension of the franchise when Pearce and Stearn expressed " Politicians of all parties, whether they wanted it or not, accepted that further extensions of the franchise were inevitable sooner or later".

The British public having more choice when voting led to Britain becoming more democratic between the mid nineteenth century and 1928. Britain had more choice because of the Emergence of the three party system. These three parties were the Conservatives, Liberals and the Labour party. The conservative party was for people who believed in the Tories for their traditional politics. The Whigs benefited from the continuing drift to their ranks of wealthy men who had once been Whigs and also newspapers like the Daily Mail supported them, they also kept their policies together for the wealthy and ordinary people.

The Liberal party was supported by thousands of Church-goers, H-Pelling describes how important they were to the Liberals when he says " In small towns and country villages the ministers and the lay preachers were the back bone of the Liberal strength". The Liberals found that most of their support was found in the English Midlands, Wales and Scotland. Finally the Labour party were supported by the working class and the poor. The Labour party was a result of Trade Unions able to find people to stand for them.

The Trade Unions were made up of working class who were educated and realised that there was not a party that supported the working class. Access to information was another reason for Britain becoming more democratic as the Railways developed it made information easy to obtain and keep people up to date in political events by making newspapers widely available and news that was recent. This is shown when Kerr and McGongle expressed " The railways reduced the isolation of some parts of the country and helped develop a national political consciousness".

As well as this public libraries were emerging were people would visit because they were free and heated, from this libraries becoming popular and information in the libraries were becoming widely used and was available for everyone. Another point proving Britain was a democracy would be that from mid 19th century education become compulsory. This meant that more and more people were becoming literate so the information available was being used and for the first time the working class began to know more and more about politics as well as everyone else in Britain.

Kerr and McGongle express on how compulsory school effected Britain when he says " The development of elementary education for all in the 1870's provided a literate society" who could read the increasing number of newspapers available, these newspapers meant that more people were now into politics than ever before. Fairness is also a reason towards Britain becoming more of a democracy by 1918 as the secret Ballot Act was introduced in 1872. This Act made it possible for voters to be able to cast there vote in private uninfluenced.

This stopped the rich landowners being able to Bribe voters to vote for a desired MP. Willis tells us the effect the Ballot Act had when he says " The Ballot Act did much to reduce the violence and street theatre associated with elections. It probably also stopped employers and landlords threatening their workers and tenants, although some doubts remained about how secretly the votes were counted and it did not stop bribery". The corrupt and Legal practices Act in 1883 also made voting more fair.

It did this by introducing fines and prison sentencing for those who exceeded the expenses list. Also the increase in the amount of voters made it harder for people to use bribery as a way of getting votes, but in smaller towns votes were still influenced as they were usually dominated by one or two employers. Voting was also Unfair as we see with the House of Lords as they had too much power so it was unfair and also political power was undue. Finally plural voting was a huge problem as people could vote more than once if they had properties in different counties.

This is especially shown by McCord when describing how people were able to do plural voting when he says " After 1884, it was still possible for a voter to a mass plural votes by acquiring several property qualifications such as 40 shillings freeholds in different county constitutes". Finally, Participation is the final reason why Britain became more of a democracy. As it became available for anyone to run to become a MP. Also MP's were starting to get the accountability to get paid for being an MP meaning that to be a MP you didn't have to be rich and that more of the working class were being represented by MP's.

Also women were able to become a MP in 1918 which also showed that Britain was progressing further into become a democracy. On the other hand there are points telling us that Britain was still far away from becoming a Democracy in some areas. This is especially shown by women under 30 still not having the vote even though the reason they gained the vote was from the war effort and how the government felt they should have this responsibility from their great effort, but the thing was most of the women that were putting so much effort into the war were not given the vote in the end because they were usually the younger women in their 20's.

Women could also only vote if they were property owners or had a husband who had a property that met the requirements, as well as women having a degree from a university had the vote. This meant that the wealthier and more educated women were given the vote instead of the working class that were a great help towards the war effort. Finally the domination of the Conservatives and Liberals had in the House of Lords, left the working class once again without proper representation. The Lordship were not properly decided but were just passed down and was more of a birth right than of what you earned and deserved.

Pugh describes of how the working class men still found it hard to vote when he says " If working men lived in lodgings, went on poor relief or moved house (as they often did to follow work opportunities), the they often lost their right to vote. Further, there were practical problems that made it difficult for working men to use their newly acquired votes. For example, polling stations were sparse and polling hours rather inconvenient, so that

most men were at work when the booths opened in the morning and had to hurry to vote in the last half hour at night”.

I believe Britain was quite far into become a democracy in some parts of politics but in others they are no where near being democratic. Britain was becoming more democratic as more people were introduced to the franchise from the new Reform Acts and as well were properly represented from the emergence of the 3 party system. Also MP's being able to be paid meant that anyone could stand for MP meaning the country was represented properly and being an MP wasn't just decided on your social rank and how wealthy you were.

As well as this the development in the railways meant that political events and news were known by everyone as newspapers were able to reach all parts of the country and everyone was able to access current news and so on. The biggest factor that was making Britain ever so closer to becoming was that Education was compulsory this meant that more and more people were literate and were able to use the information given to them to be able to vote and find out who they would most like to vote and support.

On the other hand I believe there were many aspects to how Britain was not a democracy yet, this is from the women not having the vote till they were 30 and was very dependant on wealth and education which shows again how social classes did matter then in politics. As well as this the vote was meant to be a reward for those that helped in the war effort, but the people that actually did help didn't get the reward but others did. Finally the way how the house of lords did not give proper representation and the lordship was

passed down families, just sums up why Britain was not a democracy back then.