

How successful was lord liverpools government



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Lord Liverpool's government ruled at a time of huge national discontent, arguably exacerbated by policies introduced by the government. However, there are many reasons why this government could be considered unsuccessful in terms of defeating radicalism from 1815-1827. The government during this period is considered by some to be rather successful: the period of 1815-1821 was one of great turbulence.

The initial response from the government to radicalism was one of harsh and repressive measures (the ' Reactionary Tories' phase). Examples of this emerged after 1816, such as the suspension of Habeas Corpus (allowing people to be arrested without trial) and the Six Acts of 1819 (which dramatically reduced the freedom of the people), following events like the revolutionary and treasonous Cato Street Conspiracy (1820) and the perfectly legal March of the Blanketeers (1817). Although seen by many to be excessively punitive, these measures helped to stamp out would-be revolutionaries, ensuring a modicum of stability and realising the government's main objective: to defend the country from both external and internal threats. After 1821, and with the improving economic environment, the Tory government was less threatened by protest and radicalism, and some of the harsher measures were relaxed.

This ushered in the age of the ' Liberal Tories'. This government was more inclined to listen to the needs of its people and industry, and as such encouraged free trade, ending their protectionist policies. This relaxation appeased the masses: in short, the strong economy led to social and political stability, quelling radicalism in the public. This ' pincer' movement of reactionary measures like the Six Acts (to stamp out the minority of

revolutionaries) and liberal measures like the Reciprocity of Goods Act (to placate the discontented masses) was vital in defeating radical demands.

It was this cunning strategy devised by Lord Liverpool's government that ensured the eventual stability and relative prosperity of the latter stages of the period. Finally, the impact of the death of Lord Liverpool highlights just how important he was in his role as Prime Minister, as leader of the government in this period. After 1827, the country was plunged into crisis as the radical demands returned (especially over Catholic Emancipation, which Liverpool had deliberately ignored to preserve unity and constancy in the government and in the country). This crisis is indicative of the mollifying and stable nature of Lord Liverpool, a characteristic noted by the influential historian Norman Gash, which made it ideal for dealing with the popular discontent and radical demands of the time. However, a different interpretation of this government was a 'Cabinet of Mediocrity', an opinion accredited to future Prime Minister Benjamin Disraeli. There are also many reasons why some may believe this perception to be accurate.

The government under Lord Liverpool, as previously stated, made no attempts to deal with demands for Catholic Emancipation and parliamentary reform, both issues of high importance to many of the discontented masses, including the radical minority. This passiveness on the part of Liverpool meant that when Canning (who was sympathetic towards Catholic Emancipation) succeeded him, the party was split between those willing to serve him (Canningites) and those who were not (Ultras). This led to a fracturing of the Tory party which would never be healed. Parliamentary reform was also an issue which split these two groups. So it could be

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perceived that Liverpool's passiveness on these matters (although they ensured peace in his time) led to an inevitable crisis when he left government, with differences of opinion in Parliament and increased pressure for radicals who wanted change.

Also, in their attempts to try and stop radicalism (e. g. the Peterloo Massacre, August 1819, where 11 were killed), it could be argued that Liverpool's government only fanned the flames of discontent. The repressive nature of the ' Reactionary Tories' merely served to give protestors and revolutionaries more reason for protest and revolution, highlighting heavily that this brutal action only exacerbated the problem, as it increased radical demands.

In this, it is evident that the government have acted against their best interests, which is ineffective and also destructive: not showing success in defeating radicalism, only spreading it. The factor which arguably changed everything is the economy: its improvement led to higher prosperity, which led to the government relaxing some of its harsher laws (e. g. reduction of import duties), which in turn led to lower levels of discontent. It is clear, then, that the economy was crucial in settling post-Napoleonic War Britain.

However, the government had no hand in bringing about this economic prosperity: this occurred through the ' boom-and-bust' nature of the business cycle. Therefore, it could be said that the government were not successful in defeating radical demands in this way, simply because they had nothing to do with the improvement of the economy. Finally, the latter section of this period, ruled by so-called ' Liberals', was not actually so different from the '

Reactionaries', in terms of government. Indeed, many of the prominent ' Liberals' (e. g.

Peel, Canning, Robinson, Huskisson) were already seasoned politicians from the Reactionary era. Therefore, it could be argued that the stability of this ' Liberal' period was not down to the government, as there was no transition from ' Reactionary' to ' Liberal': indeed, many feel that there was no change at all, merely continuity of the ' Reactionary Tories', who were no more sympathetic to causes like parliamentary reform than they were during the ' Reactionary' period. Hence, they did not act much differently to the repressive ' Reactionary' government, meaning that the government did not have much success in the ' Liberal' period in quashing radicalism. In summary, the government of Lord Liverpool was, in the main, rather ineffective in stamping out the threat of radicalism. Lord Liverpool ignored major issues such as parliamentary reform and Catholic Emancipation, simply putting them to one side, until they resurfaced with a vengeance and radical demands thundered back. Furthermore, the heavy-handed nature of his government only served to increase popular discontent rather than stop it, and the continuity of the same individuals during both the ' Reactionary' and ' Liberal' period meant that there was actually no change, merely a new label on an old product.

The government also got rather lucky that the economy turned for the better, as their protectionist class legislation (e. g. the Corn Laws) were the cause for widespread discontent, and the improved economy was nothing to do with them.