

# Liberal reforms 1906-1914

Government



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How successful were the Liberal government in years 1906-1914 in bringing about political and institutional reform (24) The Liberal government of 1906-1914 under Bannerman and Asquith is one often recalled for its extensive reform of the welfare system in the United Kingdom. However, it was their political and constitutional reform which caused the most uproar, as they were arguably the most successful government of the 20th century in regards to changing the way Britain was governed.

Their greatest achievement was the 1911 Parliament Act where they managed to get the Lords to sign a bill limiting their own power. When the Liberals came into power in 1906 the Conservatives held a startling majority in the House of Lords due to their representation of the wealthy and the landowners. This meant that if the Liberals wished to put forward and legislation or alter the constitution in which in which the Conservatives disagreed then the Lords could simply veto the decision whether or not the Commons agreed with it.

This angered the Liberals, particularly Lloyd George who at the time needed to obtain ? 15'000'000 to go towards the welfare reforms and to new warships and planned to form the ' Peoples budget', which was tax this money from the rich. He believed this would gain support from the working classes by showing that they didn't need to vote for socialists to have a say. The taxes were to increase the tax at over ? 3000 and ? 5000 and were to impose an inheritance tax of 20%. The Lords did veto this bill and so it led to the first general election of 1910.

The Liberals claimed that the Lords were the selfish rich who weren't willing to help the country, whereas the Conservatives tried to appeal to the

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wealthy stating that this would lead to social revolution and that it was the duty of the House of Lords to block controversial policy that the public hadn't voted on. The Liberals won with a 2 seat majority and the support of the Irish Nationalists who were hoping to obtain Home Rule through the Liberal government which led to the tax being passed.

This Liberal win led to the second constitutional crisis where the Liberals pushed a bill which sought to remove the power of the House of Lords to veto bills and replace it with a power of suspensory veto, to delay a bill for 2 years - yet remove their power entirely to alter 'money bills'. The Lords rejected this again which led to Asquith going to King Edward VII asking him to create more Liberal peers which he agreed to but died before he could bring this reality.

His son King George V preferred a more consensual agreement between the two parties and this led to the 1910 constitutional conference where the conservatives offered to reform Lords powers, yet the Liberals rejected this and the conference ended in November which led to the second 1910 general election. Both parties obtained the most seats but again the Liberals were able to maintain government through their backing from the Irish Nationalist Party and Labour. The Commons passed the bill of reform in 1911 and it was eventually passed through the Lords when the Liberals and the Conservative 'rats' outvoted the 'ditchers' by 131 votes to 114.

This limited the Lords powers but prevented the house from being swamped with new Liberal peers. This subject caused such division that Balfour was forced to resign leadership in 1911 which led to the Conservatives almost falling apart. All of this was a great success for the Liberals as it created a

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much more evenly democratic country as it meant that the elected House of Commons was now the true power of the country whereas the non-elected House of Lords had effectively lost all of its true power. Such was the effectiveness of this change; no attempt to further reform the Lords was made until 1999 by Blair's Labour.

Another great achievement was the Payment of MPs Act. Until 1910 MPs had no income from government for being an MP and so it was generally only the wealthy gentlemen of leisure that could afford to live in London without having to work that had time for governance. This meant that the working classes had very little representation as they could simply not afford to be an MP. Attempts had been made throughout the 19th century to introduce payment for MPs but had never got through the commons yet in 1910 a vote of 265 to 173 in favour of payment of MPs (largely due to Labour pressure) passed through the Commons and Lords.

This bill paid MPs ? 400 a year, which is more than most of the lower working class earned anyway and so meant many men could put themselves forward who normally would not have been able to. This led to the rise of the Labour party as they represented the working poor and therefore got their votes. It again was another act by the Liberals to introduce more representation to the governing of the United Kingdom; and this, arguably and ironically, led to their downfall. Their last act before the outbreak of the war was to pass the Third Irish Home Rule bill through the Commons and, due to the reduction of Lords power, the Lords.

This is not a success although some view it was one as it almost leads to a division of the country and acivil warin Ireland. The John Carson set up the <https://assignbuster.com/liberal-reforms-1906-1914/>

Ulster Volunteers to oppose any home rule law and had thousands of Ulstermen sign the Ulster Covenant where they agreed to oppose any home rule by any means necessary - they openly received support from the Conservatives and by the army as was seen at the Curragh mutiny where the army all resigned before they were ordered to attack the Ulstermen.

They also managed to sneak 30000 rifles and ammunition into Ireland - they meant business. The Irish Volunteers (who were the predecessor of the IRA) set up to oppose the Ulstermen and also gathered arms. Emergency talks were being held at Buckingham palace to resolve this issue but broke down and it looked like civil war and treason was inevitable, yet war broke out at the eleventh hour and the Liberals rectified the issue by sending the patriotic Ulster Volunteers straight to the Western front where they were mostly all killed on the frontline.

Over the period of office leading up to the war the Conservatives did have the two main breakthroughs in that they brought about the payment of MPs and managed to defeat the Lords in several cases and ultimately managed to curb their power and this led to the modern democracy we still enjoy in the United Kingdom today and it is for these reasons that they were successful, they brought about the largest constitutional reform then we saw in the 20th century and it is unlikely that such reform will come about in our state again - unless we are to codify the constitution at some point or abolish the Lords entirely.