

Disraeli's support for reform was motivated by personal interest
essay sample



**ASSIGN
BUSTER**

Do you agree with the view that Disraeli's support for the 1867 Reform Act was motivated mainly by personal ambition? (Written in timed conditions)

Despite the fact that Disraeli's motives in supporting the 1867 reform act are often disputed, both sources 8 and 9 assert that Disraeli's main objective was to discredit his opponents and in doing so bolster his own reputation. In contradiction, source 7 supports the idea that he was instead motivated by a desire to educate and benefit his party and the working classes. Regarding household suffrage, and the conservative victory in the 1874 election, Source 8 comments that Disraeli "encouraged" the idea that this had been his objective "all along", strongly implying that in the aftermath of success he was scrambling to take credit for the election win, desperate for the favoured reputation it would bring him amongst the new working class majority.

However, as source 7 is dated prior to the passing of the bill, we know that increasing the popularity of the Conservative Party within the boroughs had been on his mind well before the passing of the bill, even if it was not his primary motivation in supporting the bill. In fact, that source 7 Disraeli observes that "the Conservative party can win the smaller [boroughs], of which there are many": proves that he was considering the impact of the bill on his own party, and having drawn the conclusion that alteration to the franchise would benefit the Conservatives is naturally keen that it should pass. He is clearly aware of the less democratic aspects of the electoral system, ("the 'working classes' [...] Depend upon [the upper classes] for employment and existence") and recommending the bill on the grounds that it will allow the conservatives to take advantage of this fact.

However, considering Disraeli's skill in manipulation members of both houses in order to achieve his goals (allying himself with the more traditional branch of the Liberals to prevent the opposing party from passing a reform act) it is possible that he is vying for support from his party leader only so that he can claim the glory when the bill passes. As source 8 puts it, Disraeli " never really denied that his main objective was to ' dish the Whigs'" - a phrase in which no mention of politically empowering the working class or bringing his party out of the political wilderness that it inhabited prior to the 1860s is made. Source 9 supports this viewpoint, emphasising Disraeli's rivalry with Gladstone as demonstrated in his blocking of the Liberal-raised reform bill (" only one major aim: to destroy Gladstone's leadership") as the singular driving factor in his determination to guarantee the 1867 Reform Act.

The source also insists that Disraeli was " simply seizing an unexpected opportunity [...] to consolidate his own leadership of the Conservative party," a line of argument made credible by the fact that Disraeli had made little contribution to social reforms prior to this date. Overall, Disraeli's support for the 1867 Reform act may largely have been won by the opportunities it presented for the education and strengthening of his party, but I would conclude that such prospect appealed to him mostly because he saw himself as the spearhead of this success, and was eager to advance his own political standing.