

Why did the liberal party fall by 1874? essay



**ASSIGN
BUSTER**

The Liberal party was led by Gladstone during 1868-74 who also assisted its transformation. The party makeup was very complex as it involved many different groups like Peelites, Radicals as well as Nonconformists. During the beginning of the ministry Gladstone worked hard to keep the party together, however by 1870s the party started to become divided. This made it appear weaker and ineffective.

Gladstone's leadership was to blame for this. The party started to become unpopular which was the main reason why the Liberals were unable to win the 1874 election. Gladstone's domestic as well as foreign policies were becoming unsuccessful. The Conservatives provided the public an alternative to Gladstone's failing ministry, and were a main reason why Liberals were unable to secure majority at the election.

The rise of the Conservative party assisted by Disraeli was a significant obstacle for the Liberal party in 1874. Disraeli changed his tactics and started to promote his party. In 1872 he organised mass speeches where he promised to improve the lives of the people. The Manchester Free Trade Hall and Crystal Palace speeches outlined new Conservative ideas. Disraeli promised to look after the working class, introduce successful reforms and embrace imperialism. This attracted new voters and inspired lower classes towards Conservatism.

Disraeli openly criticised Gladstone for his failures and highlighted his weaknesses. This resulted in Liberals losing their supporters who now had a better alternative. It was due to Disraeli that the Conservatives started to appear strong and attract the public, had the party remained weak as it did

after the repeal of the Corn Laws in 1846, Liberals would have had a bigger chance of winning the election. Although Gladstone's own party was divided and starting to become incompetent people would have still supported them, if there had been no other alternative. That is why the growing strength of the Conservatives was the most important reason for the fall of the Liberal party in 1874.

Gladstone's leadership was also a crucial reason why the Liberals lost the election. His management of the party not only resulted in loss of the support of the public, but also the loss of backing of his own party members. At the beginning of his ministry Gladstone worked to keep all the Liberal members united, however towards the end the party started to become disjointed and Gladstone took no effective action to change the situation. Unlike his rival Disraeli, Gladstone made little use of press and mass speeches, and did not organise mass speeches to attract the public.

It is a significant reason why the party lost the election. If Gladstone had been more attentive he could have secured unity between the party members, which would have made Liberals seem stronger. In addition due to his neglect of promoting the party he lost the valuable support of the masses. Hence during the election the people were less likely to vote for him. Gladstone's weak leadership made Conservatives appear stronger. Before when he was popular with the public Conservatives struggled to secure votes.

This suggests that emergence of the opposition was partially Gladstone's fault. However, had he been more successful in gaining support he could

have won the election. Gladstone's domestic policies are another factor which contributed to the loss of the Liberals. His reforms started to become unpopular among the public and cause disunity in the party. Some of his policies could be considered as effective, like the Administrative and Law reform, because they were popular among the masses, at the same time they caused loss of backing from the traditional Whigs.

Towards the end of his ministry his policies started to become less effective. In 1872 he introduced the Licensing Act, which resulted in restriction of consumption and purchase of alcohol. It caused a deprivation of freedom and was highly unpopular among the party and the public. The Trade Union act also proved ineffective and angered the working class, whereas the Education act, which made the church be less influential, made Gladstone unpopular with the religious groups and the Church itself. The party members were becoming divided in their opinion of Gladstone's policies and the party feel mainly because of that. Each law he introduced was unpopular with one section of the party, the landed gentry were annoyed about loss of influence, whereas the lower classes felt no enough was achieved for them.

Therefore both started to look for other alternatives. Although his policies were not popular, Gladstone would have had a bigger chance of success if the growing opposition was not so strong and people didn't have an alternative to turn to. Therefore this highlights that the strength of the Conservatives was more important than Gladstone's failing policies. His actions abroad resulted in similar reaction from the public. Gladstone wanted a moral foreign policy and preferred to negotiate, rather than use "gunboat"

policy of Palmerston. However this made him appear weak in the eyes of the public and caused loss of support.

During the Franco-Prussian war in 1870s he ensured Britain had a neutral position in the conflict. The people wanted British prestige and power to be promoted internationally, and Gladstone was not achieving that. Even his own cabinet did not support his actions. In 1872 during the Alabama Affair he agreed to pay £1.5 million compensation to the USA, this presented him as weak and resulted in further loss of popularity. However, his foreign policy was not the crucial reason why Gladstone lost the election, because if had been more successful with his domestic reforms the people would have been more likely to support him. In addition, if Disraeli was not as strong the people would have voted for Liberals.

Gladstone's biggest weakness can be seen in his management of the conflict in Ireland. When he became prime minister he emphasised that his mission was to pacify Ireland. However his reforms had a limited effect, they alienated the landlords and Anglicans and caused the Irish to lose their support for Gladstone. In 1880 he introduced the Land Act which reduced the power of landowners and promised tenants compensation if they were evicted. This upset the traditional Whigs as they perceived it as an intervention in private property.

In 1873 Gladstone wanted to pass the universities Bill, which was to unite two major universities together and stop teaching history, philosophy and theology. This bill was not popular with Catholics, bishops and rejected by the government in London. Not only it split up the party and caused the Irish to

turn towards the Home Rule, Gladstone wanted to resign over the issue. However, Disraeli refused to lead minority government and Gladstone was forced to lead a disintegrated party which was going to fail. His involvement in Ireland was a feeble attempt to unite the members of the Liberal party together, but instead failed and caused loss of public support.

It was significant in the Liberal defeat of 1874 because if Gladstone handled it more effectively it would have brought back his old supporters and united the party. Although it was significant, its effects would not have been as fatal if Gladstone's previous leadership would have been more effective and the Conservatives didn't constant keep highlighting Gladstone's mistakes. Therefore the Conservatives were the main reason why the Liberals fell. Not only they provided an alternative for the people but also ensured that the public turned towards them by highlighting the opposition's mistakes. There were many factors which resulted in Liberals failing to secure majority in the election. Gladstone's party started to become less popular due to his ineffective domestic and foreign policy.

Many of his policies also divided up the party which made it appear weak and turned the voters against them. His involvement in Ireland was the final straw which caused the people to turn to another leader. However, all these mistakes would not have been as significant if it wasn't for the Conservative party. Disraeli highlighted Gladstone's mistakes in his speeches and promoted Conservative ideas, which made his party appear strong. People were provided with an alternative to turn to, if it wasn't for that Gladstone's ministry would have had a larger chance of succeeding.