

The 1832 reform act essay sample



popular pressure is a key concept in which the general public aim is to seek change from any existing government. There are two types of popular pressure. The first type being 'moral' examples of this include: picketing and petitions. The second type being 'physical' and its direct example being violence. Popular pressure played a significant part and both types of popular pressure played a key element for the passing of the Great Reform Act. Some Historians agree that popular pressure was the main reason for the passing of the Act however some disagree and argue that other factors to the passing of the Great Reform Act. As well as understanding and knowing that popular pressure contributed to the passing of the Great Reform Act we can question and yet assess to what extent how effective it was to the passing of the Great Reform Act.

Popular pressure was crucial to the passing of the Great Reform Act of 1832. The involvement of the aristocrats was a key to the cause of popular pressure. However even though the aristocrats (Tories) were involved they were against any sort of reform, and believed that if Britain reformed revolution would come after. There is however evidence to suggest that Physical force contributed greatly to the passing of the Act. The French revolution played a key role in the people of Britain wanting a reform. The working class anticipated liberty and equality. In France (1718) extreme violent were being held all over France. The French revolution can be somewhat interpreted as some sort of role model/ inspiration for the British working class. D. G. Wright (1970)¹ made known that the events of the French Revolution (1830) triggered memories of the French Revolution 1789 and intensified the negative atmosphere of a parliamentary revolution in

Britain. The first physical force during the Swing riots which consisted of all classes being involved being involved within the violence. This riot showed to what extra lengths the working class would do to seek freedom and equal opportunities. This is an indication that popular pressure was in some ways effective in creating a fear within the aristocrats (fearing revolution) also suggesting that the British did not take the French revolution lightly and the British too were willing to adapt to violence in order to reformation.

Marxist Historians argue totally against the idea that popular pressure was the cause of the passing of the Great Reform Act. Marxist's believe that the passing of the Act was due to the drive within parliament itself. Behagg)² also writes " E. P Johnson claims that 'Britain was within an ace of revolution' and he is aware of the autumn of 1831 with the riots that followed the Lords' rejection (1832), as the potentially revolutionary moments". The regularity (due to physical force) in which revolution could have taken place. This once again suggests the importance of the passing of the Great Reform Act. This also indicates and suggests that the extreme violent made the passing of the Act more considerable. The October riots are show clearly how close Britain was to a revolution. D. G Wright states " after the peers rejected the second Bill in October 1831, there were serious outbreaks of violence at Derby, Nottingham and Bristol." Popular pressure can also be seen in the initiation of the run that drained the Bank of 40% of its reserves during the " days of May" ³. It seems to occur that civil unrest was a key factor whilst in the process of passing the reform. It also shows how easily and close the aristocrats may have been at edge to just ' give in'.

References:

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1 D. G Wright. Democracy and Reform 1815-1885 (Long mans(1970)

2 Clive Behagg (1991) Labour and Reform: Working Class Movements 1815-19124

3 D. G. Wright, Democracy and Reform 1815 – 1885 Longmans (1970)