

1) How democratic was Britain after the reform acts?

1870

After the reform acts Britain was more democratic, but nearly half of all men and nearly all women were not permitted to vote.

The NEW UNIONS representing dockers, women in sweatshops and farm labourers grew with nearly 2 million members.

In 1868 these unions were amalgamated into the TRADES UNION CONGRESS (TUC).

1880

1890

In 1893 working class groups came together to form the INDEPENDENT LABOUR PARTY.

The LABOUR party was convinced that political representation of the working class in parliament was the only way to get support for union issues.

In the 1901 election they won 2 seats. By 1910 this had increased to 49 seats. As more working class people got the vote it was clear that the LABOUR PARTY was becoming a political force to be reckoned with.

1900

In 1900 workers on the TAFF VALE railway in Wales went on strike. The courts ordered the unions to pay compensation to the company caused by the strike. Legislation made it challenging for the trades union.

1910

By 1911 the LIBERAL PARTY, who were in power, were fearful of the growing support of the LABOUR PARTY.

The Liberal party appealed to the workers by bringing in new laws to help the workers.

These included:-

NATIONAL INSURANCE ACT – which paid sickness benefit to any worker who paid 2d into the scheme.

OLD AGE PENSIONS ACT – To provide a pension for those who reached 70 years of age.

The House of Lords were angry at the reforms because they would be expected to pay for them in taxes. A Peoples Budget had been created to do this.

In 1911 the PARLIAMENT ACT forbade the House of Lords from blocking any law that had passed through the Commons. This represented a huge shift in power away from the landowning classes that had controlled the country since the BILL OF RIGHTS 200 years before.

1911

2) Votes for Women

1897

In 1867 John Stuart Mill put forward a plan for women to get the vote that was rejected.

Women were not allowed to vote in Britain in 1900 because:-
They were considered to be weaker than men.
They were thought to be uneducated and ignorant of politics.
Women's domestic role would not allow for politics.
Women did not fight in the army.
Even Queen Victoria was against women voting.

In 1897 the NUWSS (Suffragists) were formed, led by Millicent Fawcett.

1903

In 1903 Emmeline Pankhurst formed another women's suffrage group. They were called the WSPU (Suffragettes).
The WSPU believed that the NUWSS were too peaceful and were getting nowhere. They wanted to try MILITANT methods such as violent protest, prison and hunger striking and disorder.
The WSPU effectively declared war on the Liberal government. However, they were a minority group of 2,000 members compared to the NUWSS who had 50,000 members.
The WSPU were sensational and difficult to handle, but their behaviour gave the government a reason not to give women the vote.

1906

Between 1906 and 1913 there were six occasions when votes for women was considered in parliament. It was defeated for several reasons:-

- Opposition MPs (Conservatives)
- Sometimes it was abandoned due to lack of time in parliament.
- Sometimes it was abandoned due to the election.

In 1908 Emmeline Pankhurst and her daughter, Christabel, barged into the House of Commons.

1910-1913

The NUWSS hold 400 meetings around the country. Millicent Fawcett considers an alliance with the Labour Party to get political support for women.

The Suffragettes purposefully get arrested. In prison they go on hunger strike and attempt to embarrass the government. The government issues the CAT and MOUSE ACT to release and re-arrest the Suffragettes when they are healthy again.

Herbert Asquith, the Liberal Prime Minister, is so concerned it is rumoured that he is considering giving women the vote.

1914

In 1913 a Suffragette called EMILY DAVISON is killed by the King's horse in the Derby race. This is after bouts of arson and attacking politicians.

When World War One broke out the WSPU and NUWSS supported the government. The WSPU were involved in recruiting women into war work:-
800,000 women worked in heavy industry.
They made up the majority of munitions workers.
Women fed the army through the land army.
They served as nurses and drivers.

1918

In January 1918 the government introduced the REPRESENTATION OF THE PEOPLE ACT to give women the vote over aged 30. This act also gave all men over 21 years old the vote.

The act was received with opposition from the House of Lords.

However, it was accepted as the first step by Millicent Fawcett towards universal female suffrage.

Ultimately, women's war work had proved their level of responsibility and the government could not refuse when they were considering giving more men the vote.

3) Parliament and people 1918-1945

1918

Both wars required support from the British public to be fought. In WW1 the people supported because of patriotism and in WW2 it was fear of the Nazi Germany. The work of the Liberal government before the war in helping the less fortunate meant that in WW1 people were accepting of government control. As a reward for the war the government issued the REPRESENTATION OF THE PEOPLE ACT which gave all men over 21 and all women over 30 the vote. In 1918 the Prime Minister said that the government's role was to make the country fit for heroes to live in, but this proved challenging.

1926

Post WW1 Britain was grim in many ways. Economically the country struggled as did much of Europe. There was high unemployment. The Conservative government constantly clashed with Trade Unions in May 1926 there was a GENERAL STRIKE. Many workers felt bitter and betrayed as if their role in winning World War One had been forgotten by the government.

1928

In 1928 all women over 21 years old were given the vote.

1944

In 1944 SIR WILLIAM BEVERIDGE published the BEVERIDGE REPORT which identified 5 great social problems:-

Poverty, disease, ignorance, squalor and idleness.

Beveridge set out a plan to tackle these problems. He wanted to create a WELFARE STATE where the most in need would be supported. He wanted to create a NHS (NATIONAL HEALTH SERVICE). The LABOUR PARTY backed Beveridge and the Conservatives, shy of government intervention, also promised some support for the poor.

1945

Both parties were promising to build a better Britain in the election. Churchill (Conservatives) was hoping for a victory having won the war. However, the Labour Party won a landslide victory and introduced Beveridge's ideas which included:- FAMILY ALLOWANCE (1945) NATIONAL INSURANCE (1946) NHS (1948) Massive house building programme. Nationalisation of the coal and railway industries. Full employment creating 1 million jobs.

Post-1945

After the war the Liberal party went into decline and the Conservative and Labour party became the two leading parties. Interestingly, when the Conservatives won the 1951 election they chose not to reverse Labour's policies. They had come to the conclusion that parliamentary intervention in peoples' lives had become an essential aspect of government.