

CHAPTER
23
SECTION 1

Section Summary

DEMOCRATIC REFORM IN BRITAIN

In 1815, Britain was governed by a constitutional monarchy with a Parliament and two political parties. However, it was far from democratic. The House of Commons, although elected, was controlled by wealthy nobles and squires. The House of Lords could veto any bill passed by the House of Commons. Catholics and non-Church of England Protestants could not vote. **Rotten boroughs**, rural towns that had lost most of their voters during the Industrial Revolution, still sent members to Parliament. At the same time, new industrial cities had no seats allocated in Parliament.

The Great Reform Act of 1832 redistributed seats in the House of Commons, giving representation to new cities and eliminating rotten boroughs. It enlarged the **electorate** but kept a property requirement for voting. Protesters known as the Chartists demanded universal male suffrage, annual parliamentary elections, salaries for members of Parliament, and a **secret ballot**. In time, most of the reforms they proposed were passed by Parliament.

From 1837 to 1901, the great symbol in British life was **Queen Victoria**. She set the tone for the Victorian age that was named for her. She embodied the values of duty, thrift, honesty, hard work, and respectability. Under Victoria, the middle class felt confident. That confidence grew as the British empire expanded.

In the 1860s, a new era dawned in British politics. **Benjamin Disraeli** forged the Tories into the modern Conservative Party. The Whigs, led by **William Gladstone**, evolved into the Liberal Party. Disraeli and Gladstone alternated as prime minister and fought for important reforms. The Conservative Party pushed through the Reform Bill of 1867, which gave the vote to many working-class men. In the 1880s, the Liberals got the vote extended to farm workers and most other men.

By century's end, Britain had truly transformed from a constitutional monarchy to a **parliamentary democracy**. In this form of government, executive leaders are chosen by and responsible to the parliament, and they are members of it. In 1911, measures were passed that restricted the power of the House of Lords, and it eventually became a largely ceremonial body.

Review Questions

1. What was the result of the Great Reform Act of 1832?

2. How is a parliamentary democracy organized?

READING CHECK

What are rotten boroughs?

VOCABULARY STRATEGY

What does the word *allocated* mean in the underlined sentence? Note that the Great Reform Act of 1832 corrected the problem described in this sentence by "redistributing" seats in the House of Commons. Use this context clue to help you understand the meaning of the word *allocated*.

READING SKILL

Identify Main Ideas What is the main idea in the first paragraph of the Summary?
