

The Age of Realism: 1850-1871

Victorian England

Great Britain did not face the same degree of social and political turbulence as much of continental Europe. In part this was a result of the Reform Act of 1832, which gave political representation to the middle class. The Victorian Age was noted for its middle-class prosperity, which ushered in a period of national pride associated with the reign of Queen Victoria. Not every social group expressed satisfaction with the political situation, however; members of the working class demanded the franchise for themselves, too. This goal was achieved through the Reform Act of 1867, which extended voting rights to urban working-class males.

During much of the Victorian era, British politics were dominated by two politicians: Liberal Party Prime Minister William Gladstone and his Conservative Party counterpart, Benjamin Disraeli. Both parties used reform to attract new voters. Disraeli was responsible for the Reform Act of 1867, while Gladstone and the Liberal Party took credit for policies that opened the doors to civil service employment.