World History GCSE

# GCSE World History – British Depth Study

## The Social Reforms

### Intro

In the late 1800’s people in Britain where destitute there was mass poverty, and the government provided no help in solving the problem, for the old, ill or unemployed.

Towards the end of the nineteenth century government inspections had managed to improve pay, safety and conditions in many working areas – one third of the population were in poverty.

### Problems in the late 1800’s for the Poor

1. The only work available for the poor came in the form of hard **workhouses** run by local councils. They provide basic **food** and **lodging** in **long hours** in **harsh, brutal and bad conditions.** It was seen socially as **shameful to work there.**
2. There was **serious unemployment** in many industries and no unemployment benefit or ‘dole’ to help them.
3. Old age was the single largest cause of poverty, many people relied upon their families to support them in their old age – most had no savings. The only **option** was the **workhouse** for many of them.
4. Illness was prevalent in many areas as working and living conditions where **damp** which often caused illness, the lack of sewage systems also played a part – they risked losing jobs or missing work – for which there was no compensation.
5. Only the **rich** could afford **healthcare** or **doctors**
6. **Many** children missed **education** as they had to work from a young age – leading to a poverty trap where they couldn’t better their situation.
7. A lot of people **couldn’t** afford to eat properly.
   1. When men signed up to fight in the Boer War (1899-1902) half were malnourished

### Reports from Social Reformers

Not everybody though poverty was bad, especially the rich. **Two** reports said that poverty **was** serious.

#### Charles Booth

He published the first edition of **Life and Labour of the People** in 1889.This showed that30% of people in London were living in severe poverty, and that it was sometimes **impossible** for people to find work. He also showed that **wages** were so **low** that they couldn’t **support their families**.

* He was a successful businessman (owner of a Liverpool shipping line) and so was taken more seriously that reports before his.
* He focused on realism in his report, not exaggerations, he sought to find the true scale of the problem - which he thought was better than previously reported

#### Seebohm Rowntree

He owned a famous sweet factory in York. He didn’t think the problem was as bad there as n London – he did his own study. The report was published in **1901** called **Poverty, A study of town life.** It showed that 28% of people in York were so poor they couldn’t afford basic housing or food.

##### Findings

* His report into the causes of poverty in York showed that
  + 52% of poverty was caused by Large families
  + 22% by Low wages
  + 10% by death of the wage earner
  + 5% by Unemployment
  + 5% by Old age or illness
  + 6% by other means
* He concluded that the state should help support the old, ill, young and unemployed
* It shocked people as York was seen as a 'middling' town it wasn't massive and sprawling industrial town - yet 27% of people were in Poverty.

### The different attitudes to Poverty

The oldest most powerful parties were the - Liberals and Conservatives - they didn't agree with giving government help to people. They thought that:

1. The government should interfere **as little as possible** in peoples lives
2. It was wrong to raise taxes as people should **decide** how to spend their own money
3. Giving poor people money was **morally wrong** as it **undermined their independence**.

The **Labour Party** didn't have many MPs before 1906, but they did have growing support from the **working classes**. The Labour Party believed that:

1. The poorest in society should get the governments help
2. The government should get cash to pay for this help through taxes
3. The government should take over (**nationalise**) the major industries and make use of its profits.

### Why were the Reforms Introduced?

#### **Change in Public Opinion**

It was impossible to put 1/3 of Britain in the Work House a new approach was needed.

1. Popular and well-respected writers like **George Bernard Shaw, J. Galsworthy, Charles Dickens and H.G.Wells** all wrote about how the poor lived they said that the **government** should pass law to **help the poor**.
2. People involved in **public health** and medicine said the government should get more involved in health issues.
3. Socialists argued that wealth should be more equally spread between working people and people like landowners and factory owners, who were usually the richest
4. The **labour party** was the only mainstream socialist political party. They argued that the government should give financial help to the poorest members of society. Labour was attracting more and more working class supporters

#### Work Of the Reformers

1. The work of the social reformers (Charles Booth & Seebohm Rowntree) had a powerful impact on the liberals - especially Rowntree's report effected the Liberals as he had been a long term supporter and was a friend to liberal MP David Lloyd George who in **1908** **became Chancellor of the Exchequer**
2. David Lloyd George called this approach **New Liberalism**. It was now seen as morally wrong that such enormous poverty should exist alongside massive wealth

#### Other Sources of Information

1. Other sources were sending the government information - The **salvation army** was collecting information (and they ran **training** courses for the unemployed)
2. The governments own civil servants were collecting data and so were local authorities (who provided sanitation, education, clean water and health care)
3. A Royal Commission was set up to investigate poverty in particular the **Poor Law** - The poor law was a 19th Century (1815) Law which set up the **workhouses** and other 'help' for the poor (after the **1834** Poor Law amendment act). The commission was meant to decide if enough help was given to the poor. The members couldn't agree and so made 2 reports
   1. The Majority Report
      1. If the people were poor it was their **own fault.**
      2. They made themselves poor by **gambling** and **drinking** - so they didn't deserve help.
      3. Enough was being done for the poor already.
   2. The Minority Report
      1. People couldn't help being poor.
      2. **Illness**, **old age** and a **shortage of jobs** made people poor.
      3. They thought more should be done to prevent people being poor.

#### Evidence piled up showing the scale of the problem

1. The poor died much younger than the rich
   1. Life expectancy for poor people was only 45, much less than rich people
   2. In 1900 there were 163 deaths per thousand - much higher than todays figure of 12 per thousand - men and women in poor areas could easily fall victim to illness or accident
2. The wealth was very uneven 10% of the population owned 93% of the countries wealth

#### National Efficiency

##### The Boer War

1. Between **1899 and 1902 Britain** fought the **Boer war** to defend South African territory
2. **Half** of the troops who volunteered were unfit for services due to ill health - in the poorest areas **69%** of people were unfit. The potential recruits were so badly fed they hadn't grown properly - the army had to **lower the minimum** height to get enough people
3. This was alarming as the government needed to be able to call up a strong army at short notice the government set up the **Committee of Physical Deterioration** to investigate the issue its findings influenced the reforms

##### An Effective Work Force

1. From 1870 onwards Britain's position as the **leading industrial** power was challenged by **USA and Germany** - by 1900 both countries had overtaken Britain
2. Lloyd George was impressed by the German welfare system introduced by **Bismarck** - their rapid industrialisation seemed to be linked with a healthier, better educated workforce

#### The Work of Individuals

##### David Lloyd George and Winston Churchill

* Lloyd George **sympathised** with the poor/ordinary people because of his humble Welsh origins - he was a very good politician in 1908 he had risen to the post Chancellor of the Exchequer
* Winston Churchill, he had been a leading conservative but switched sides in 1906 when the Liberals started introducing their Welfare Reforms supposedly because he supported them however is enemies said it was because he didn't want to be in opposition. In **1908** he became **President of the Board of Trade** - these two and others read the work of Booth and Rowntree and were aware of the contrast between wealth and poverty.

Both of these politicians hoped to make a name for them and saw this as an opportunity - though both of them were successful at the time

#### Political Rivalry

Another key factor was the political rivalry between **Conservatives** and **Liberals**. The Conservatives introduced their own welfare measures when they were in power - in **1905** they introduced the **Unemployed Women’s Act** to help fight high unemployment.

Also the Liberals thought it might undermine the Labour party as they called for reforms - in **1906** the labour party was small with **29 seats**, the liberals hoped it would stay this way. Many working class people voted for the Labour party the liberals hoped they could win the vote from them.

They thought it would undermine socialism if the working classes were better off and so less likely to join a revolution like the ones threatening Russia, France and Germany at the time.

It was also a way to differentiate Liberals from Conservatives and method to unite and inspire Liberals.

## The Laws Introduced

### Laws to Help Children

In **1906** the **School Meals Act** allowed Local Education Authorities to supply **free** school meals paid for from local council tax (it didn't force).

1. The act didn't force LEAs to provide food
2. **14 Million** meals were served up in 1914 most of which were free
3. Only **half** of Britain's local authorities set up a meals service

In **1907** local education authorities started giving **free medical inspections** to schoolchildren. Many had built in clinics where they held them. Poor children also got **free medical treatment**.

1. It was compulsory for LEAs to set it up
2. It was free - many parents otherwise couldn't afford healthcare
3. At first it was only **checks** however in **1912** it expanded to include treatment
4. It was left to LEAs to make sure it worked so medical care varied widely in quality and quantity across the country.

In **1908** Parliament passed the **Children and Children and Young Persons' Act** (also known as the **Children's Charter**) to give children **legal protection**. The Charter made it illegal for children younger than 16 to: **buy cigarettes, go to pubs or beg**. It also set up special juvenile courts - so young offenders wouldn't be tried n an adult court. It made it illegal to insure a childs life.

**Herbert Samuel** from the Home Office tried to help young offenders:

1. He set up special prions (or **borstals**) for young offenders - so they wouldn't go to adult prison
2. He set up **the probation service** to try to keep young people from reoffending

### Measures to help The Old