

The National Archives
Education Service

Britain 1906-1918

Gallery One: Liberal
Welfare Reforms 1906-
1911



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Liberal Welfare Reforms 1906-1911

Overview

The Liberal Party won a massive victory in the election of 1906. However, during the election campaign they did not promise to bring in welfare reforms. In fact, poverty and welfare were not big election issues for any of the big parties. Despite this, the Liberal government brought in wide-ranging and controversial reforms almost as soon as they took office.

So historians have often puzzled over why they did this, and now it's your turn!

THE BIG QUESTION IN THIS GALLERY IS:

**WHAT LAY BEHIND THE
LIBERAL WELFARE REFORMS 1906-11?**

Look at the Big Question for a worksheet that will show you how to use the case studies and how to organise your work.

Case Studies

The Big Question is too big to tackle in one go, so we have broken it up into smaller sections called case studies. Look at the case studies to study the historical sources.

See the following case studies in this gallery to study the sources:

- [Young People](#)
- [Old People](#)
- [Working People](#)
-

Gallery Background

See Gallery Background for some information and sources which may be useful in your investigation.

Case Study – Young People

Young People Overview

Soon after they came to power the Liberals introduced a wide range of welfare reforms. Many of their most important reforms concerned children.

In this case study you are going to study a number of sources from the time. These sources will help you to decide why the Liberals thought measures were needed to help and protect children.

Sources:

- [Notes on children's health in London, 1903](#)
- [Letter on children's health in Leeds, 1903](#)
- [Letter on children's health in Blackburn, 1903](#)
- [Working class housing in Liverpool, 1900s](#)
- [Call to introduce school meals](#)
- [Evidence on employment of children, 1906](#)
- [Letter on wage earning children, 1907](#)
- [Byelaws relating to children, 1908](#)

How to use the sources in this case study:

You can use these case study sources in two ways:

The Big Question

All of the sources in this case study have been chosen to help you decide why the Liberals brought in measures to help children. If you are tackling the Big Question Part 1 you should:

- Study each source carefully – use the questions to help you get the most from the source.
- Look at the list of possible reasons in Part 1 of the Big Question.
- Decide which reasons are supported or contradicted by the source.

Exam Practice

If you want to get some practice on examination type questions, just go to or download the Practice Questions.

Don't forget – if there are words or phrases in the sources which you cannot understand, try the glossary

Source 1

Notes from a meeting of officials looking into the health of children in London schools 1903
(PC8/584)

How to use this source to help you answer the Big Question :

You need to study the source carefully before you decide whether it supports or contradicts any of the reasons in the Big Question.

Ask Yourself:

- What does the source tell me about the mental health of children at the time?
- Does it give any clues about the extent of problems of children's health?
- What does it tell me about the reasons for the health of children?
- Is Dr Eicholz a good source of information?
- Do his points agree or disagree with your own knowledge or other sources?
- Does his language and tone give you confidence in him?

Source 1A

In the slum Schools he found that 66 per cent of the children were unable to keep pace with the Curriculum and were backward to the extent of 1, 2, 3, 4 or even 5 years. The children were permanently imperfect in physical development and as one out of every six London Schools was a slum School it might be taken as a low estimate that there were 60,000 physically inferior children in London alone.

The cause of this was want of food; the London slum parents were not up when they should be preparing the children for School. The children consequently went to School without a proper meal in the morning. In one School he estimated that 75 per cent of the children suffered for this reason.

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Source 1B

Another fruitful cause of inferior physique was the inferiority of the housing, more especially the prevalence of the one roomed tenement. There were 12,000 of these in Lambeth and though Housing Schemes were carried out they only resulted in a spreading of the evil as people of the slum class will not go to better accommodation.

Besides these causes the poor and dirty clothes, want of sleep and drunkenness among the parents all contributed to physical degeneration.

Other causes were overwork, some children had to take out milk and crossed the river walking one or two miles before School. Then there was the influence of heredity, the parents married at too early an age, and the children grew old rapidly, children of 15 looking many years older and they died young.

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Source 2

Extract from a letter by Mr William Hall to The Yorkshire Post on the health of children, published in 1903
(PC8/584)

How to use this source to help you answer the Big Question :

You need to study the source carefully before you decide whether it supports or contradicts any of the reasons in the Big Question.

Ask Yourself:

- What does the source tell me about the health of children at the time?
- What does it tell me about the scale of the problem of unhealthy children?
- What reasons does Mr Hall give for the poor health of children?
- Do you think Mr Hall's attitude towards the parents is fair?
- Do his points agree or disagree with your own knowledge or other sources?
- Does his language and tone give you confidence in him?
- Does it surprise you that the Liberals introduced free school meals (1906) and compulsory medical inspections (1907)?

Source 2A

By the kind permission of the Leeds School Board, and by the help of the schoolmasters, I have examined 100 school children in Leeds ; 50 boys and 50 girls, aged 10, 11, and 12 years respectively.

Twenty-five boys and twenty-five girls were taken indiscriminately from a Board school in a very poor district, and the same number of corresponding age from a district inhabited by working men of the "well-to-do" class. Each child was examined separately.

As to Rickets.—It was manifest in 30 out of 50 children at the poor-class school ; in only 10 out of 50 at the well-to-do.

As to Teeth.—In the poor-class they were bad in 27 out of 50 ; in the well-to-do they were bad in 22.

As to Weight.—In the poor-class each child averaged nine pounds less than the well-to-do school child.

As to Height.—Each poor child measured on average 6 inches less than the well-to-do child.

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As to Height.- Each poor child measured on average 6 inches less than the well-to-do child.

Source 2B

I followed some of these poor-class children to their homes. There I found that they rarely have milk in their food, not often meat, and that bread with margarine or with treacle, and tea without milk, form the staple of their morning and evening meals. In one of these poverty stricken homes I found that a man, his wife, and six children were subsisting upon his weekly wage of 18s., out of which 4s. was paid for rent. In another, the weekly wage and the rent were about the same as in the case just mentioned, and here the wife had been mother to eight children, four of whom were dead, one was dying before his first birthday, and the three surviving "remnants" were very rickety.

Is this state of society to continue?

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Source 3

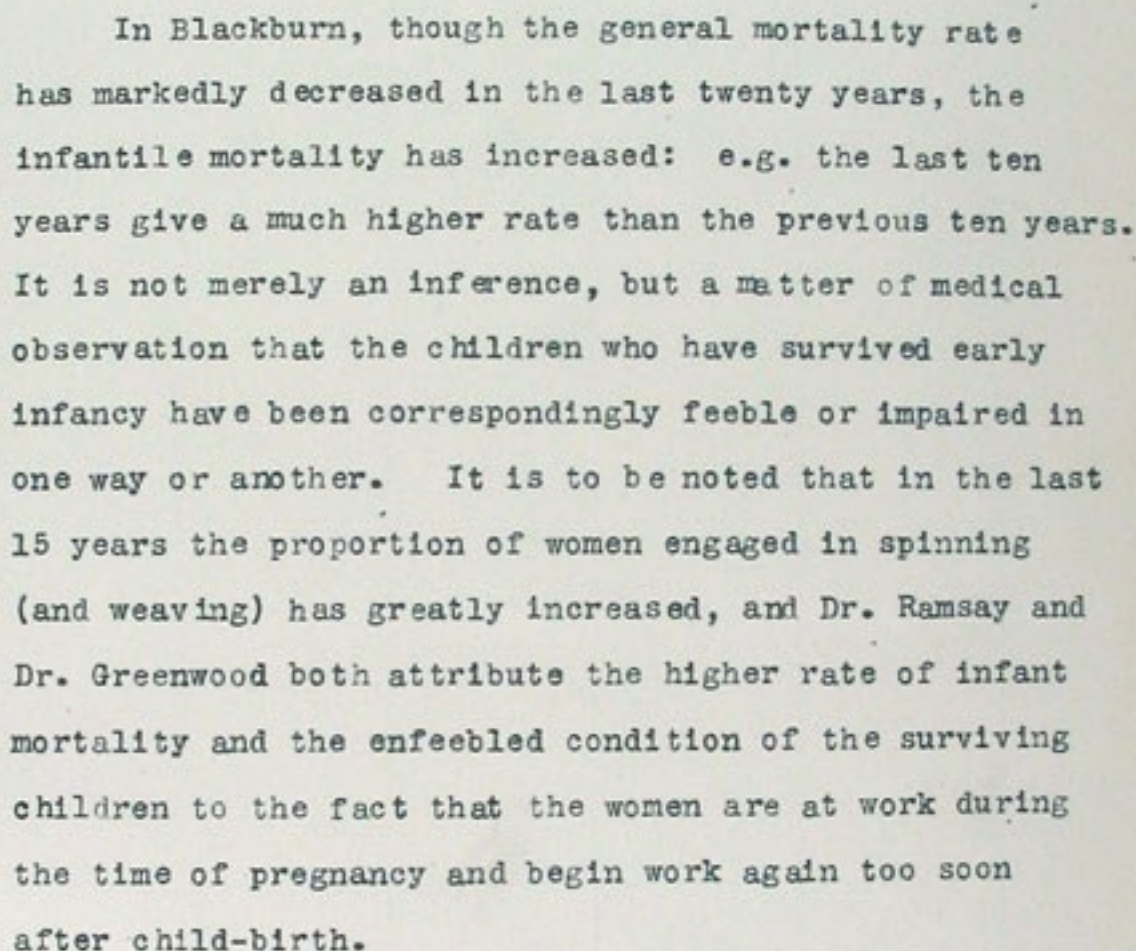
Part of a letter written in 1903 by Mr Ernest Campagnac, an official in the Blackburn Board of Education (PC8/584)

How to use this source to help you answer the Big Question :

You need to study the source carefully before you decide whether it supports or contradicts any of the reasons in the Big Question.

Ask Yourself:

- What issue seems to be the main concern of Mr Campagnac?
- What is causing the problem (in his opinion)?
- Is his opinion convincing?
- Can you suggest possible reasons why the problem is happening?
- What could a government do to help with this problem?



In Blackburn, though the general mortality rate has markedly decreased in the last twenty years, the infantile mortality has increased: e.g. the last ten years give a much higher rate than the previous ten years. It is not merely an inference, but a matter of medical observation that the children who have survived early infancy have been correspondingly feeble or impaired in one way or another. It is to be noted that in the last 15 years the proportion of women engaged in spinning (and weaving) has greatly increased, and Dr. Ramsay and Dr. Greenwood both attribute the higher rate of infant mortality and the enfeebled condition of the surviving children to the fact that the women are at work during the time of pregnancy and begin work again too soon after child-birth.

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Source 4

Working class housing in Liverpool in the early 1900s: problems and solutions:

Source 4A : Tenement housing in Whittle Street, Liverpool 1902 (Liverpool City Engineer's photographs courtesy of Liverpool Record Office) (LRO 352 ENG 2/1648)

Source 4B : The interior of tenement housing in Eldon Street 1903 (Liverpool City Engineer's photographs courtesy of Liverpool Record Office) (LRO 352 ENG 2/1813)

Source 4C : Plans drawn up by Liverpool City Council for new housing in Eldon Street, Liverpool 1903 (Liverpool City Engineer's photographs courtesy of Liverpool Record Office) (LRO 352 ENG 2/431)

Source 4D :  The new housing completed in Eldon Street, 1905 (Liverpool City Engineer's photographs courtesy of Liverpool Record Office) (LRO 352 ENG 2/770)

How to use this source to help you answer the Big Question :

You need to study the source carefully before you decide whether it supports or contradicts any of the reasons in the Big Question.

Ask Yourself:

- What must it have been like to live in the accommodation shown in 4a?
- Do you think that the homes visited by William Hall in source 2 may have looked like this?
- How would images like this have affected public opinion?
- How would they have affected government action?
- What is your opinion of Liverpool City Council after looking at all 4 pictures?

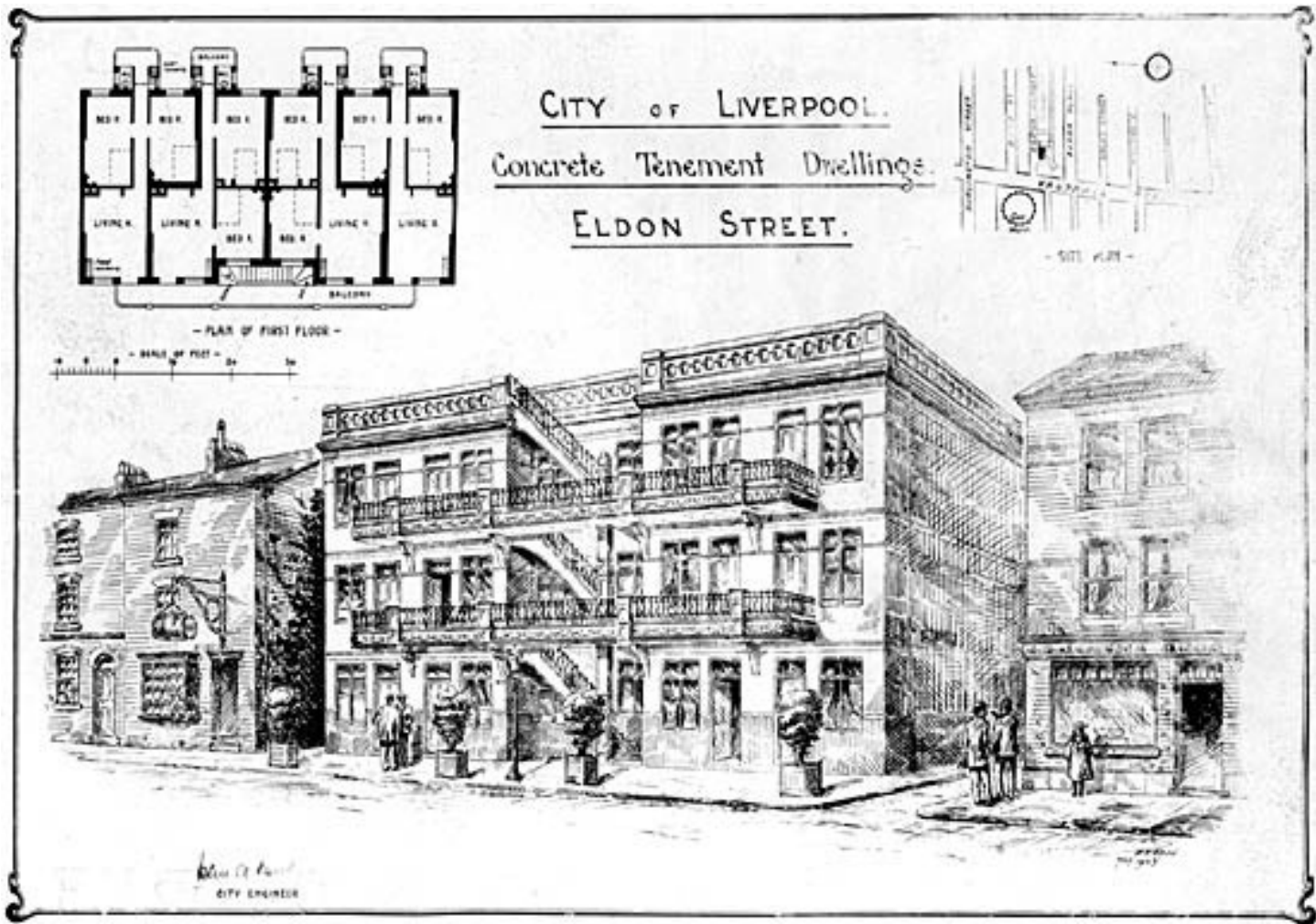
Source 4A



Source 4B



Source 4C



Source 4D



Source 5

Extract from a resolution at a conference of Labour Party members calling for the government to introduce school meals for children

(PRO 30/69/1828. Material in the copyright of Ramsay MacDonald is reproduced by permission of the granddaughter of the late Malcolm MacDonald.)

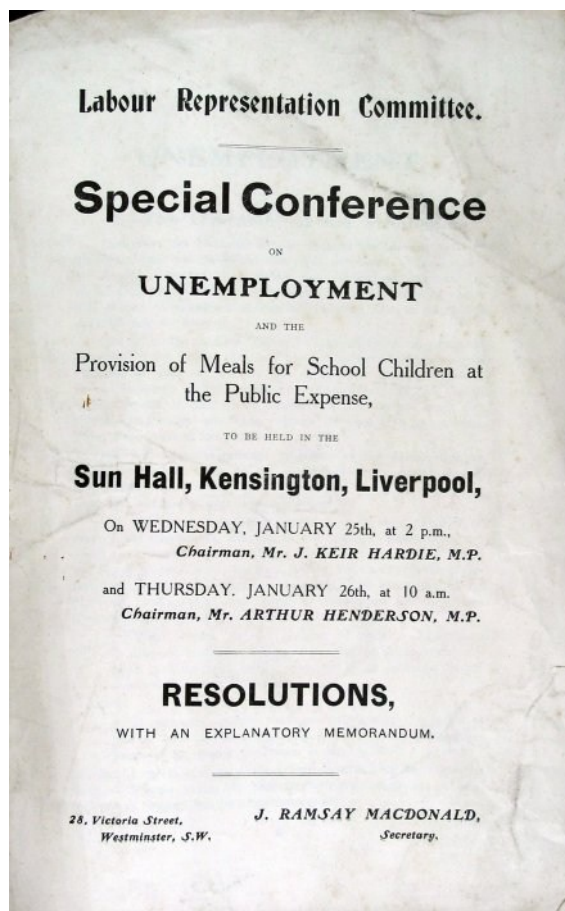
How to use this source to help you answer the Big Question :

You need to study the source carefully before you decide whether it supports or contradicts any of the reasons in the Big Question.

Ask Yourself:

- What are the main concerns expressed about child welfare?
- Do these concerns agree with those expressed in other sources in this case study?
- What exactly does the Labour Party want the Liberal government to do?
- How would a leading Liberal MP like Winston Churchill react to this source?

Source 5A



Transcript

Labour Representation Committee

.....
Special Conference

ON

UNEMPLOYMENT

AND THE

Provision of Meals for School Children at the Public Expense

TO BE HELD IN THE

Sun Hall, Kensington, Liverpool,

On WEDNESDAY, JANUARY 25th at 2p.m.

Chairman, Mr J Keir Hardie, M.P.

and THURSDAY, JANUARY 26th at 10a.m.

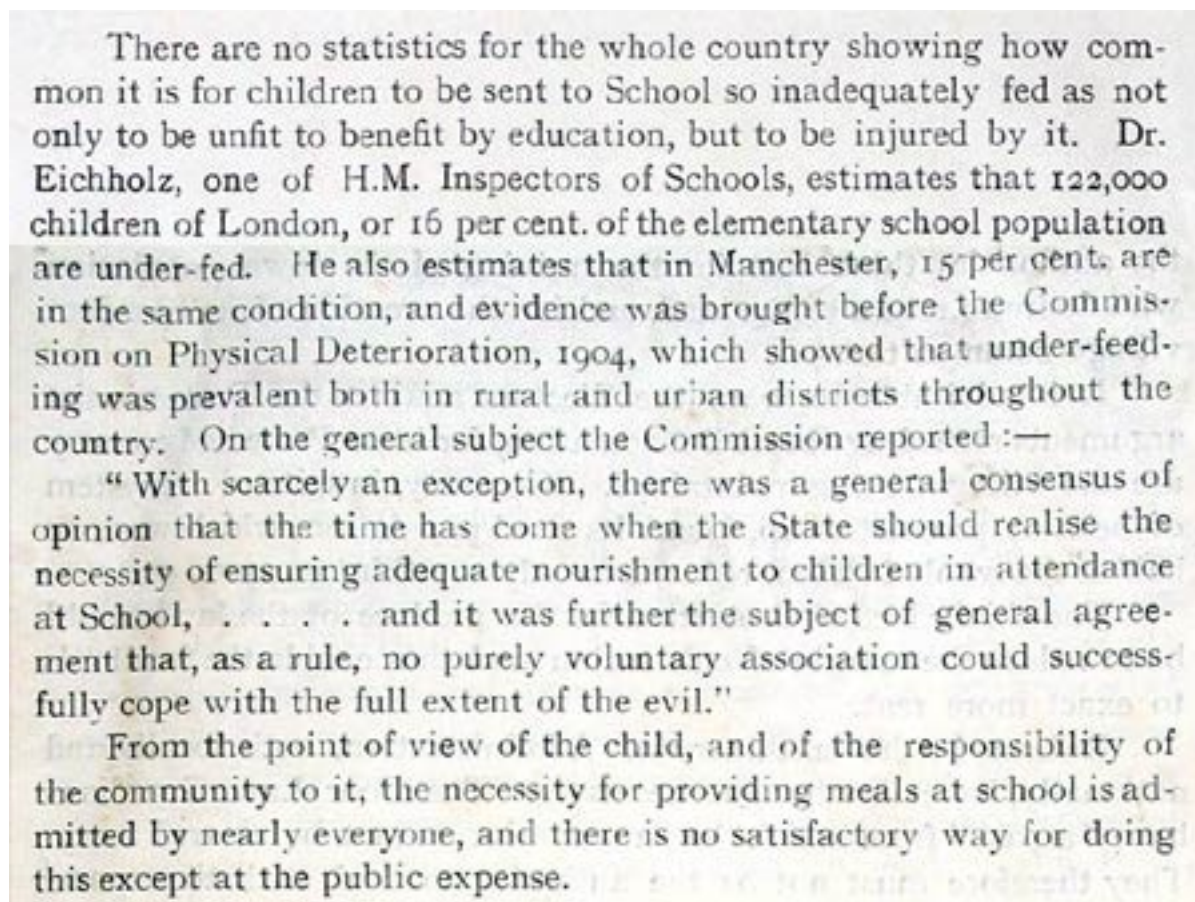
Chairman, Mr Arthur Henderson, M.P.

.....
RESOLUTIONS

WITH AN ESPLANATORY MEMEORANDUM.

.....
28 Victoria Street,
Westminster, S.W.

J.RAMSAY MACDONALD,
Secretary.

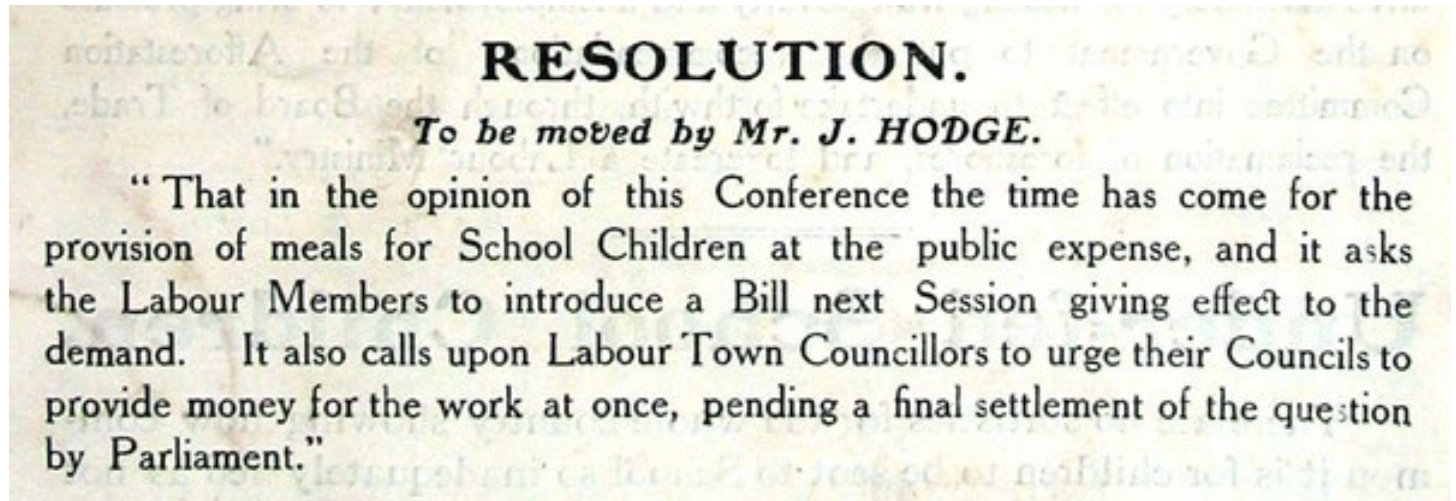
Source 5B**Transcript**

There are no statistics for the whole country showing how common it is for children to be sent to School so inadequately fed as not only to be unfit to benefit by education, but to be injured by it. Dr. Eichholz, one of H.M. Inspectors of Schools, estimates that 122,000 children of London, or 16 per cent. of the elementary school population are under-fed. He also estimates that in Manchester, 15 per cent. are in the same condition, and evidence was brought before the Commission on Physical Deterioration, 1904, which showed that under-feeding was prevalent both in rural and urban districts throughout the country. On the general subject the Commission reported :-

"With scarcely an exception, there was a general consensus of opinion that the time has come where the State should realise the necessity of ensuring adequate nourishment to children in attendance at School,and it was further the subject of a general agreement that, as a rule, no purely voluntary association could successfully cope with the full extent of the evil."

From the point of view of the child, and of the responsibility of the community to it, the necessity for providing meals at school is admitted by nearly everyone and there is no satisfactory way for doing this except at the public expense.

Source 5C



Transcript

RESOLUTION.

To be moved by Mr J HODGE.

“That in the opinion of this Conference the time has come for the provision of meals for School Children at the public expense, and it asks the Labour Members to introduce a Bill next Session giving effect to the demand. It also calls upon Labour Town Councillors to urge their Councils to provide money for the work at once, pending a final settlement of the question by Parliament.”

Source 6

Sample piece of evidence submitted to the government's Inter-Departmental Committee on Employment of Children 1906

(HO 45/10502/122/671/53)

How to use this source to help you answer the Big Question:

You need to study the source carefully before you decide whether it supports or contradicts any of the reasons in the Big Question.

Ask Yourself:

- Why does Miss Holme object to boys working in barber shops?
- Does Mr Greenlaw object for the same reasons?
- Is it more useful to have these two extracts than just one?

Miss Holme - a school manager - London.
Would like to prohibit - Barbers' shops are
regular gambling places - Hours late - work not
heavy, but on their feet all the time.
Teachers say these barbers' boys certainly
deteriorate in manners and everything else.
Would prohibit. Would not be a serious thing
for barbers as they do very well and could
employ someone over 14.

Mr. Greenlaw. Superintendent of School
Attendance Officers, Manchester:
"Barbers' shops are generally very small, often
in poor neighbourhoods, and not very well
ventilated. They are sometimes overcrowded
with customers who are not too clean and the
atmosphere the boy breathes is undoubtedly bad.
They are there a long time. On Saturday
evenings they are ^{there} very often till midnight, and
on Friday evenings they are late, Some are
late every evening in the week, and also work
several hours on Sundays."

Transcript

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Mr. Greenlaw. Superintendent of School Attendance Officer, Manchester:

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Source 7

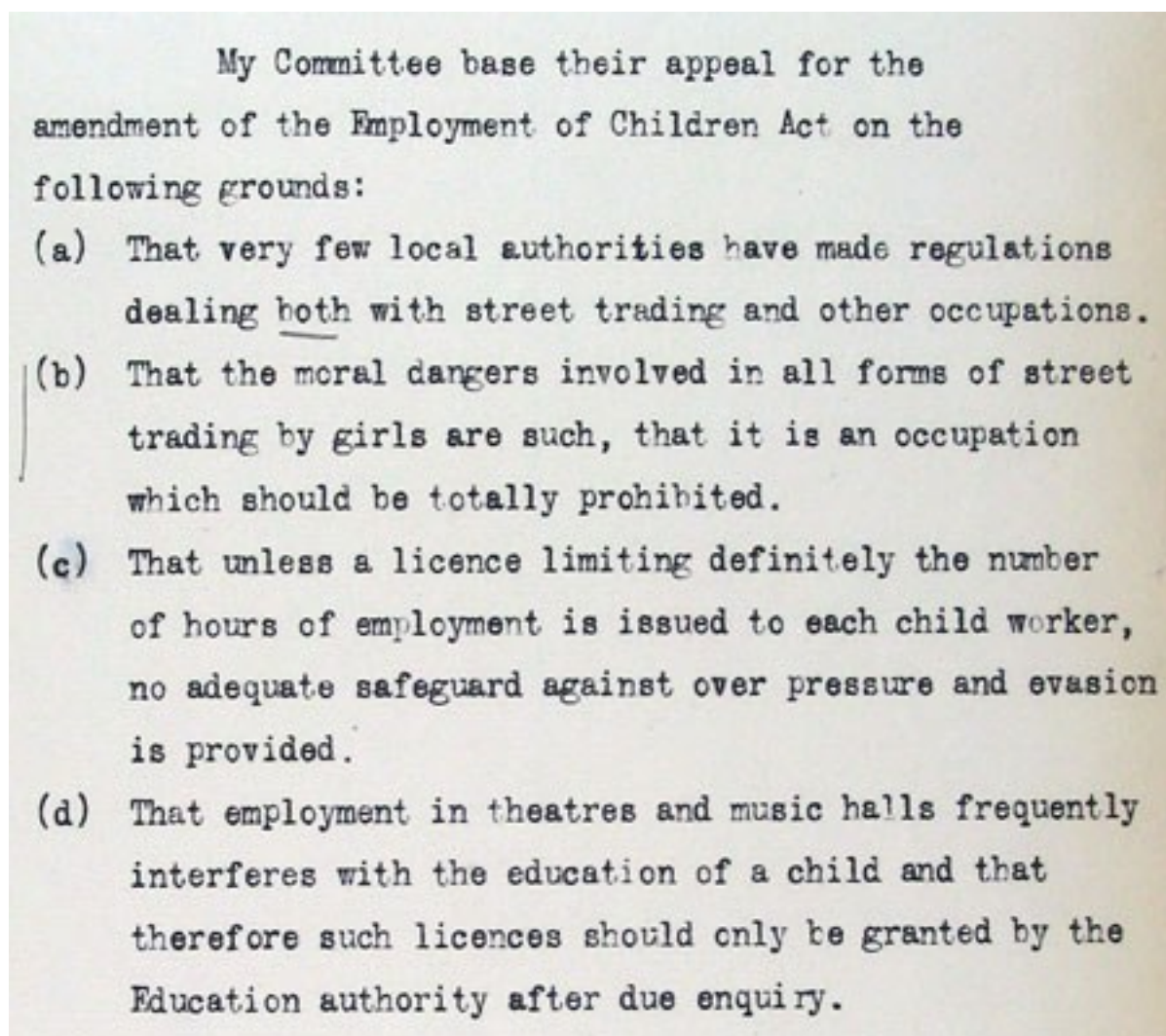
Part of a letter written in 1907 by Nettie Adler, a leading figure in the Committee on Wage Earning children (HO 45/10502/122671/f.53)

How to use this source to help you answer the Big Question :

You need to study the source carefully before you decide whether it supports or contradicts any of the reasons in the Big Question.

Ask Yourself:

- What is Nettie Adler's view on the actions of local authorities?
- Why do you think the Committee is worried about girls trading?
- Does this source suggest that employers cannot be trusted to look after the child?
- What is wrong with theatres?
- Do you regard this as a particularly useful piece of evidence?



My Committee base their appeal for the amendment of the Employment of Children Act on the following grounds:

- (a) That very few local authorities have made regulations dealing both with street trading and other occupations.
- (b) That the moral dangers involved in all forms of street trading by girls are such, that it is an occupation which should be totally prohibited.
- (c) That unless a licence limiting definitely the number of hours of employment is issued to each child worker, no adequate safeguard against over pressure and evasion is provided.
- (d) That employment in theatres and music halls frequently interferes with the education of a child and that therefore such licences should only be granted by the Education authority after due enquiry.

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- c) That unless a license limiting definitely the number of hours employment is issued to each child worker, no adequate safeguard against over pressure and evasion is provided.
- d) That employment in theatres and music halls frequently interferes with the education of a child and that therefore such licences should only be granted by the Education authority after due enquiry.

Source 8

Announcement in the Birmingham News on byelaws relating to children passed by the Kings Norton and Northfield Council in 1908

(HO 45/10385/168943)

How to use this source to help you answer the Big Question :

You need to study the source carefully before you decide whether it supports or contradicts any of the reasons in the Big Question.

Ask Yourself:

- What is the Council trying to achieve with these measures?
- Do you think they will work?
- Would the author of Source 6 have been happy to see these measures?
- Does this source suggest there was no need for the Liberal government to pass child protection laws?

BYE-LAWS REGULATING STREET TRADING.

(a) General Regulations.

1. No child under the age of eleven shall be employed or engage in street trading.

2. No girl of fourteen years of age or over that age and under sixteen years of age shall be employed or engage in street trading at any time unless she is accompanied by a parent or guardian.

3. No person under the age of sixteen shall be employed in or carry on street trading after nine o'clock in the evening.

4. No person under the age of sixteen engaged in street trading shall enter any premises licensed for public entertainment or for the sale of intoxicating liquor for consumption on the premises, for the purpose of trading.

5. No child shall be employed or engage in street trading on Sundays.

6. No child who is not exempt from school attendance shall be employed in or carry on street trading during school hours.

(b) Regulations as to Licences.

7. No person under sixteen shall be employed or engage in street trading unless furnished with a licence from the Council.

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Case Study – Old People

Old People Overview

Soon after they came to power, the Liberals introduced a wide range of welfare reforms. In 1908 they introduced Old Age Pensions. At the time this was a radical step.

In this case study you are going to study a number of sources from the time. These sources will help you to decide why the Liberals thought measures were needed to help and protect old people.

Sources:

- [Extract: 'The Ragged Trousered Philanthropists'](#)
- [Cartoon on how government could spend money](#)
- [Extract on the need for Old Age Pensions, 1906](#)
- [Extract on the need for Old Age Pensions, 1906](#)
- [Secret discussion on Old Age Pensions. 1908](#)

How to use the sources in this case study:

You can use these case study sources in two ways :

The Big Question

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Source 1

Extract from 'The Ragged Trousered Philanthropists', a novel published in 1914 but set in 1906
(British Library W 26/067 2)

How to use this source to help you answer the Big Question :

You need to study the source carefully before you decide whether it supports or contradicts any of the reasons in the Big Question.

Ask Yourself:

- 31 How had old Jack Linden tried to earn some money?
- 31 What other jobs had he tried?
- 31 What kind of help did Jack get and who helped him?
- 31 What makes you think this document is a good/weak source of information?
- 31 The author of the book wrote this about it: 'the work possesses at least one merit - that of being true. I have invented nothing. There are no scenes or incidents in the story that I have not either witnessed myself or had conclusive evidence of'. Do you find this convincing? (You may want to look at the other sources before you make your mind up in this question.)

Source 1A

CHAPTER XX

THE VETERAN

OLD Jack Linden had tried hard to get work—work of any kind—but nobody wanted him; and, to make things worse, his eyesight, which had been failing for a long time, became very bad. Once he was given a job by a big provision firm to carry an advertisement board about the streets, its previous bearer, an old soldier, having been sacked the day before for getting drunk on duty. The advertisement was not an ordinary pair of sandwich boards, but a sort of box without any bottom or lid: a wooden frame, four sides covered with canvas, on which were pasted printed bills advertising margarine.

Old Linden had to get inside this thing and carry it about the streets. It swayed about a good deal as he walked along, especially when the wind caught it, but there were two handles inside to steady it by. The pay was eighteen pence a day, and he was obliged to travel a certain route, up and down the busiest streets.

At first the frame did not feel very heavy, but the weight seemed to increase as the time went on, and the straps hurt his shoulders. He felt very much ashamed, also, whenever he encountered any of his old mates, some of whom laughed at him.

What with the frame requiring so much attention to keep it steady, and his sight being so bad, the old man several times narrowly escaped being run over. Another thing that added to his embarrassment was the jeering of the other sandwich men, the loafers outside the public houses, and the boys, who shouted “old Jack-in-the-box!” after him. Sometimes the boys threw refuse at the frame, and once a decayed orange thrown by one of them knocked his hat off.

By the time evening fell he was scarcely able to stand for weariness. His shoulders, legs and feet ached terribly, and as he was taking the thing back to the shop he was accosted by a ragged, dirty-looking, beer-sodden old man whose face was inflamed with drink and fury. This was the old soldier who

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Source 1B

The Ragged Trousered Philanthropists

had been discharged the previous day. He cursed and swore, and accused Linden of "taking the bread out of his mouth"; and, shaking his fist fiercely at him, shouted that he had a good mind to knock his face through his head and out at the back of his neck. He might possibly have tried to put this threat into practice but for the timely appearance of a policeman, when he calmed down at once and took himself off.

Jack did not go the next day; he felt that he would rather starve than have any more of the advertisement frame, and from this time forth he seemed to abandon all hope of earning money: wherever he went it was the same, no one wanted him. So he just wandered about the streets aimlessly, now and then meeting an old workmate who asked him to have a drink; but this was not often, for nearly all of them were out of work and penniless.

Transcript

had been discharged the previous day. He cursed and swore, and accused Linden of "taking the bread out of his mouth"; and, shaking his fist fiercely at him, shouted that he had a good mind to knock his face through this head and out at the back of his neck. He might possibly have tried to put this threat into practice but for the timely appearance of a policeman, when he calmed down at once and took himself off.

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Source 2

'Financial year, ending of - What will he do with it' by W.K. Haselden; Daily Mirror, 29 March 1906

(WH0016. Reproduced by permission of the Centre for the Study of Cartoons and Caricature, University of Kent and Mirror Group)

How to use this source to help you answer the Big Question :

You need to study the source carefully before you decide whether it supports or contradicts any of the reasons in the Big Question.

Ask Yourself:

- According to the cartoon, what are the possible areas the government could spend money on?
- Does Asquith look as though he has made his mind up how to spend his money?
- According to the cartoonist, do old age pensions seem to be a priority?
- Why should we be careful about using this cartoon as evidence of what Asquith was thinking?
- In what ways is this cartoon useful to historians?



Source 3

Extract from a document on the need for Old Age Pensions. It was presented to the Cabinet by the Chancellor of the Exchequer in 1906

(CAB 37/85/96)

How to use this source to help you answer the Big Question :

You need to study the source carefully before you decide whether it supports or contradicts any of the reasons in the Big Question.

Ask Yourself:

- What problems do skilled men face as they get older?
- Is the situation better or worse for unskilled workers?
- Is poverty in old age a large-scale problem?
- What makes you think this document is a good/weak source of information?

1. As regards the falling-off of employment as life advances, different trades vary, but it is safe to say that after 45 it becomes increasingly difficult for a man to obtain employment in most of the skilled trades, and for those over 55 the chances of getting regular work are rare. For the unskilled labourer over the age of 55 there is still less opportunity. The whole tendency of the age is to pay men better but to retire them earlier.

2. Estimates vary as to the extent to which old age is responsible for pauperism. The most reliable figures are to be found in Mr. Burt's Return of the numbers in receipt of Outdoor or Indoor Relief in England and Wales. This showed that in September 1903 the number of paupers 65 years of age and upwards was 284,265, which is equivalent to 18·3 of the total number of persons of the same age, or, roughly, one in six.

The number of paupers over 60 and *under* 65 is only 6·1 of the total population of the same age. This jump from 6·1 to 18·3 may be taken as almost conclusive evidence that after the age of 60 increasing years are one of the main causes of pauperism.

[1007]

B

Transcript

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Source 4

Extract from a document on the need for Old Age Pensions. It was presented to the Cabinet by the Chancellor of the Exchequer in 1906

(CAB 37/85/96)

How to use this source to help you answer the Big Question :

You need to study the source carefully before you decide whether it supports or contradicts any of the reasons in the Big Question.

Ask Yourself:

- Why were Friendly Societies concerned about the government bringing in old age pensions?
- According to the Chancellor, are the Friendly Societies right to be concerned?
- Does the Chancellor feel that Friendly Societies are doing enough to solve the problem of poverty in old people?
- What concerns does he have about the Friendly Societies?
- Does he have the same concerns about trade unions?

Source 4A

3. A noticeable feature in Old Age Pension propaganda has been the opposition which it excited among the representatives of the Friendly Societies. Their contention has been that, if the State undertook the task of insurance, it would sap the independence of the working classes and unfairly compete with Friendly Society work.

for, from an examination of Friendly Society operations, it is not apparent how a universal State grant could sensibly interfere with their business. What the Friendly Societies mainly concern themselves with is the provision of Sick and Funeral Benefits and Life Insurance, and they do but little in the way of deferred annuities, a form of thrift that apparently appeals less strongly to the working classes. Two of the most important Friendly Societies, the Manchester Unity of Oddfellows and the Foresters, have indeed started superannuation schemes, but their success has been of the slightest.

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Source 4B

In other directions, the Friendly Societies do in fact give much assistance to their members in old age, by allowing them to draw sick pay, although not strictly entitled to the benefit. This practice must in the long run affect the financial stability of the Friendly Societies, as

it was never contemplated that old age was to be treated as sickness. In fact, some of the older Societies have been ruined by the practice, and others are beginning to realize its dangers, and to a great extent are discontinuing it. It follows, therefore, that if the State undertook a superannuation system the Friendly Societies would be relieved considerably, and could devote themselves more securely to their normal objects.

The more important Trades Unions spend yearly large amounts in the grant of superannuation allowances to their aged members. In this case the age of retirement from active work is from 50 to 55. Here, again, it is extremely doubtful whether the financial position of the Trades Unions is sufficiently stable to secure a continuance of these benefits. A big strike might easily exhaust all available funds.

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Source 5

Secret discussion document on Old Age Pensions produced for the government in April 1908
(CAB 97/92/54)

How to use this source to help you answer the Big Question :

You need to study the source carefully before you decide whether it supports or contradicts any of the reasons in the Big Question.

Ask Yourself:

- Why does the document suggest that contributory schemes are the not the right answer to the issue of old age pensions?
- Why would contributory schemes not work in practice?
- Why is the scheme funded by the Treasury rather than by local authorities?

Source 5A**1. All "contributory" schemes are ruled out.**

If the contribution which is to be the condition of a pension is left to the option of the would-be pensioner, the assistance of the State would be confined to a comparatively small class, and that neither the most necessitous nor in all cases the most deserving. If, on the other hand, the contribution were made compulsory, there is no practicable machinery by which, in a country such as this (whatever may be the case in Germany), it could be worked in face of the

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Source 5B

2. The obligation to provide the pension must, as between the State and the pensioner, rest on the Treasury, and not on any local authority.

The objections to any other course are insuperable. It is sufficient for the purpose to point out that to make the charge a local burden would (a) lead to every kind of inequality, owing to the large differences between place and place in the proportion which the aged bear to the whole population, (b) reintroduce the evils of the old Law of Settlement, (c) bear most heavily upon the most necessitous districts.

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Case Study – Working People

Working People - Overview

As well as helping children and old people, the Liberal government also passed measures to help working people who were ill or unemployed. The work of social reformers like Charles Booth, along with the work of the government's own officials, showed that the government needed to take action. In 1909, the government set up a system of Labour Exchanges - a bit like modern job centres. In 1911 the government brought in National Insurance, which gave workers sick pay and unemployment pay.

These were radical measures for the time. In this case study you will examine some of the evidence which convinced the government that the measures were needed.

Sources

- [Extract: 'The Ragged Trousered Philanthropists'](#)
- [Scheme to help the unemployed in London](#)
- [Labour proposals to help unemployed, 1907](#)
- [Confidential report on underemployment, 1910](#)
- [Speech at unemployed workers meeting, 1908](#)
- [Central Body Report for Unemployed Workmen](#)
- [National Insurance and Labour Exchanges](#)
- [Survey of the Problems of Pauperism, 1910](#)

How to use the sources in this case study:

You can use these case study sources in two ways :

The Big Question

All of the sources in this case study have been chosen to help you decide why the Liberals brought in measures to help children. If you are tackling the Big Question Part 1 you should:

- Study each source carefully – use the questions to help you get the most from the source.
- Look at the list of possible reasons in Part 1 of the Big Question.
- Decide which reasons are supported or contradicted by the source.

Exam Practice

If you want to get some practice on examination type questions, just go to or download the Practice Questions.

Don't forget – if there are words or phrases in the sources which you cannot understand, try the glossary

Source 1

Extract from 'The Ragged Trousered Philanthropists', a novel published in 1914 but set in 1906
(British Library W 26/067 2)

How to use this source to help you answer the Big Question :

You need to study the source carefully before you decide whether it supports or contradicts any of the reasons in the Big Question.

Ask Yourself:

- Was Frank Owen the sort of worker whom politicians at the time would have approved of?
- What evidence is there in this passage that Frank was not a lazy worker?
- What problems faced Frank in trying to find work?
- This extract comes from a novel, and the author was a Socialist. Does that affect your view of this source's reliability?

CHAPTER IV

THE PLACARD

FRANK OWEN was the son of a journeyman carpenter who had died of consumption when the boy was only five years old. His mother earned a scanty living as a needlewoman, and when Frank was thirteen he went to work for a master decorator who was a man of a type that has now almost disappeared, being not merely an employer but a craftsman of a high order, and Frank acquired a knowledge of decorative painting and design, and graining and sign writing.

His mother died when he was twenty-four, and a year afterward he married the daughter of a fellow-workman.

In those days trade was fairly good, and, although there was not much demand for the more artistic kinds of work, still the fact that he was capable of doing them, if required, made it comparatively easy for him to obtain employment. They had one child—a boy—and were very happy, and for some years all went well. But gradually this state of things altered. Broadly speaking, the change came slowly and imperceptibly, although there were occasional sudden fluctuations.

Even in summer Owen could not always find work, and in winter it was almost impossible to get a job of any sort. At last, about twelve months previously, he had determined to leave his wife and child at home and go to try his fortune in London, intending to send for them when he got employment.

It was a vain hope. He found London, if anything, worse than his native town. Wherever he went he was confronted with the legend: "No hands wanted." He walked the streets day after day; pawned or sold all his clothes save those he stood in, and stayed in London for six months, sometimes starving and only occasionally obtaining a few days' or weeks' work.

At the end of that time he was forced to give in. The privations he had endured, the strain on his mind, and the foul atmosphere of the city combined to defeat him. Symptoms of the disease that had killed his father began to manifest themselves, and, yielding to the repeated entreaties of his wife, he returned to his native town, the shadow of his former self.

That was six months ago, and since then he had worked for Rushton and Company, although occasionally when they had no work in hand he was "stood off" until something came in.

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Source 2

An early scheme to help the unemployed in London. Report on Hollesley Bay Farm Colony; 1905
(PRO 30/69/1824)

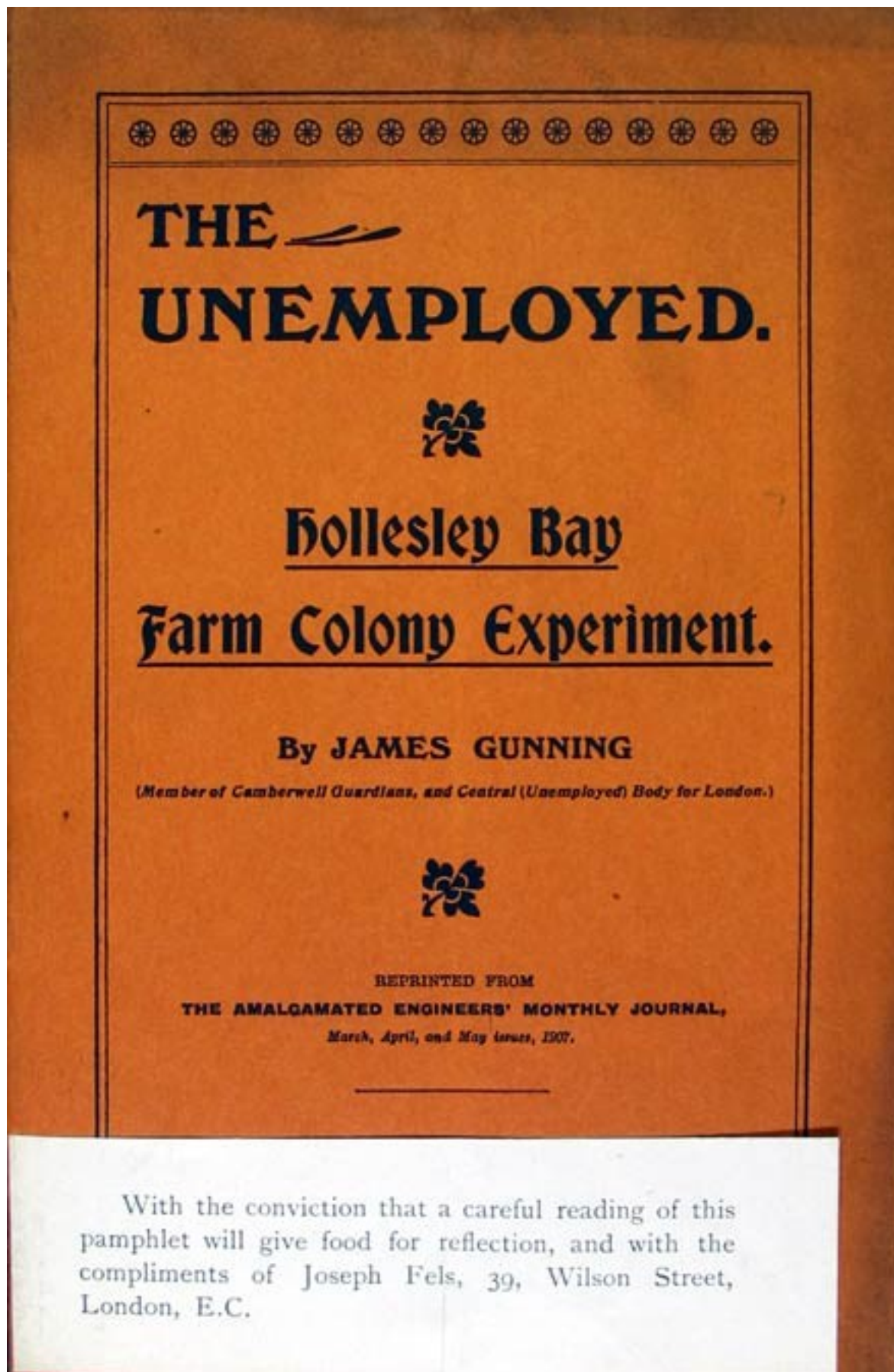
How to use this source to help you answer the Big Question :

You need to study the source carefully before you decide whether it supports or contradicts any of the reasons in the Big Question.

Ask Yourself:

- What is the condition of the men in source 2a?
- How do you think the cottage in source 2b compared with the London homes of the unemployed?
- Source 2c shows produce grown by unemployed men which they then sold successfully. Does this source prove the Hollesley Bay scheme was a success?
- This scheme could find work for about 200 unemployed workers. Do you think this made much of an impression on the problem of unemployment in London? (You may want to come back to this question after looking at other sources.)

Source 2A



With the conviction that a careful reading of this pamphlet will give food for reflection, and with the compliments of Joseph Fels, 39, Wilson Street, London, E.C.

Transcript

THE
UNEMPLOYED
Hollesley Bay
Farm Colony Experiment

By James Gunning
(Member of Camberwell Guardians, and Central (Unemployed) Body for London.)

Reprinted from
The Amalgamated Engineers' Monthly Journal,
March, April, and May issues, 1907.

Source 2B

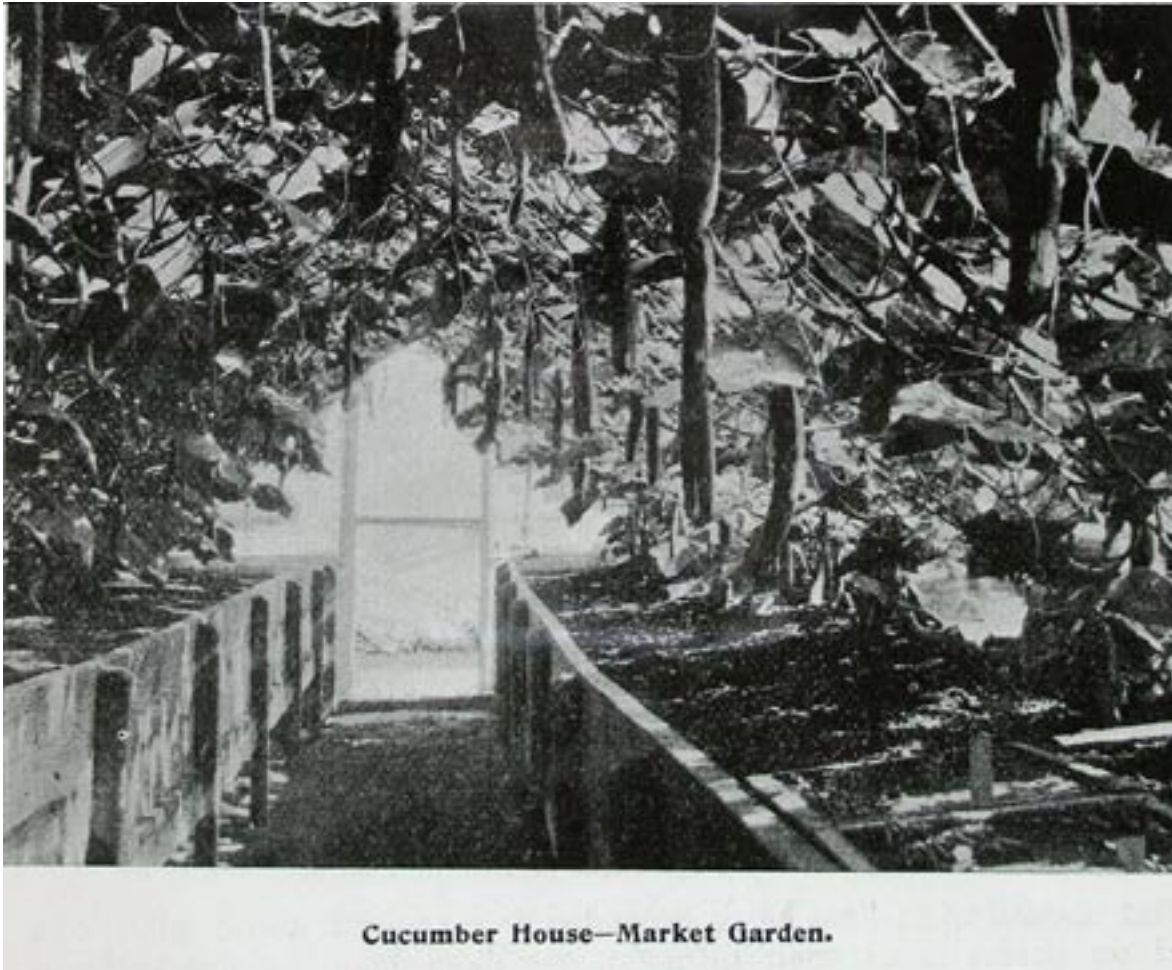


Source 2C



One of the New Cottages (Small Holding), Hollesley Bay Colony.

Source 2D



Cucumber House—Market Garden.

Source 3

Labour Party proposals for measures to help the unemployed, published in 1907

PRO 30/69/1787. Material in the copyright of Ramsay MacDonald is reproduced by permission of the granddaughter of the late Malcolm MacDonald.)

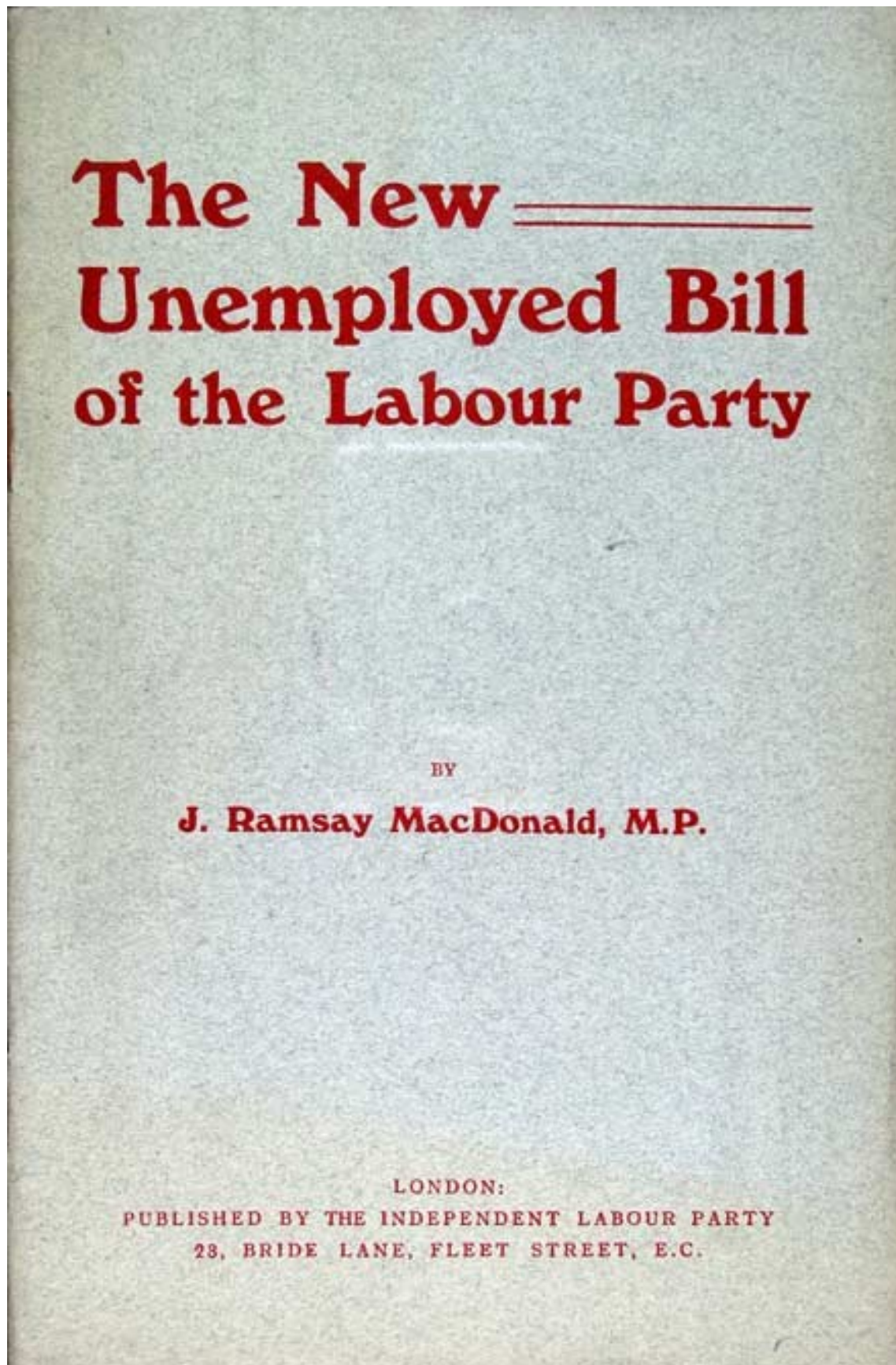
How to use this source to help you answer the Big Question :

You need to study the source carefully before you decide whether it supports or contradicts any of the reasons in the Big Question.

Ask Yourself:

- How would Clause 2 part (2) help some of the problems facing working people?
- How would an unemployed worker feel about Clause 3?
- Clause 7 contains 3 sections. Which of these sections might do most to generate support for the Labour Party among working people?
- How would a Liberal politician like Lloyd George react to seeing this document?

Source 3A



Transcript

The New
Unemployed Bill
of the Labour Party

By
J.Ramsay MacDonald, M.P

London:
Published by the Independent Labour Party
23, Bride Lane, Fleet Street, E.C.

Source 3B

*THE LABOUR PARTY'S UNEMPLOYED BILL.**CLAUSE 1.*

(2) Local unemployment authorities may act together as joint bodies for the purpose of carrying out the provisions of this Act.

CLAUSE 3.

Where a workman has registered himself as unemployed, it shall be the duty of the local unemployment authority to provide work for him

or otherwise, or failing the provision of work, to provide maintenance should necessity exist for that person and for those depending on that person for the necessities of life :

CLAUSE 7.

(2) The unemployment committees shall draw up a scheme for providing work for the registered unemployed persons of their area, and such scheme shall, so far as possible, provide for the classification of applicants for work, so that they may be set to work which is suitable to the individual applicant,

(4) The local unemployment authority may assist an unemployed person by aiding the emigration or removal to another area of that person and any of his dependents.

(5) The local unemployment authority shall not supply workmen to firms of employers or their agents, servants, or representatives during times of trade disputes in which these firms or employers are involved.

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Source 4

Extract from a confidential report for the British government on unemployment published in 1910. This section deals with the effects of underemployment
(CAB 37/96/159)

How to use this source to help you answer the Big Question :

You need to study the source carefully before you decide whether it supports or contradicts any of the reasons in the Big Question.

Ask Yourself:

- What is the attitude of Churchill towards men who do not have work?
- In what ways have foremen and employers made the problem worse?
- How does short time working affect families?
- How does unemployment affect workers?
- Why is it difficult to find new work?
- Would you say this document is sympathetic towards unemployed workers, or just simply well informed about their problems?

fluidity. No one but a rascal is permanently without employment. But large numbers are either constantly under-employed or periodically unemployed. While there is no

pause, yet at the base of many great and thriving trades there spreads a broad fringe of casual, parasitic, and underpaid labour. The practice, deliberate or unconscious, of a certain number of employers and even foremen, to have around their gates or within summons a larger number of workers than they actually require aggravates the evil. The custom in many trades to resort to abrupt discharges of workpeople, even without regard to whether they are married or single, whenever an economic shrinkage occurs, rather than to any system of short time, smashes households like egg-shells. The helplessness of the displaced worker, left to himself to find fresh employment upon chance or rumour, leads to aimless wanderings and loiterings often fatal to character. Vague, scanty, and imperfect information about where workmen are wanted, what localities are congested, what trades are being over-stocked or are declining, impedes existing agencies of relief; and the lack of any conscious direction, even of the most general character, allows the yearly reinforcement of youth to drift unguided into the confusion.

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Source 5

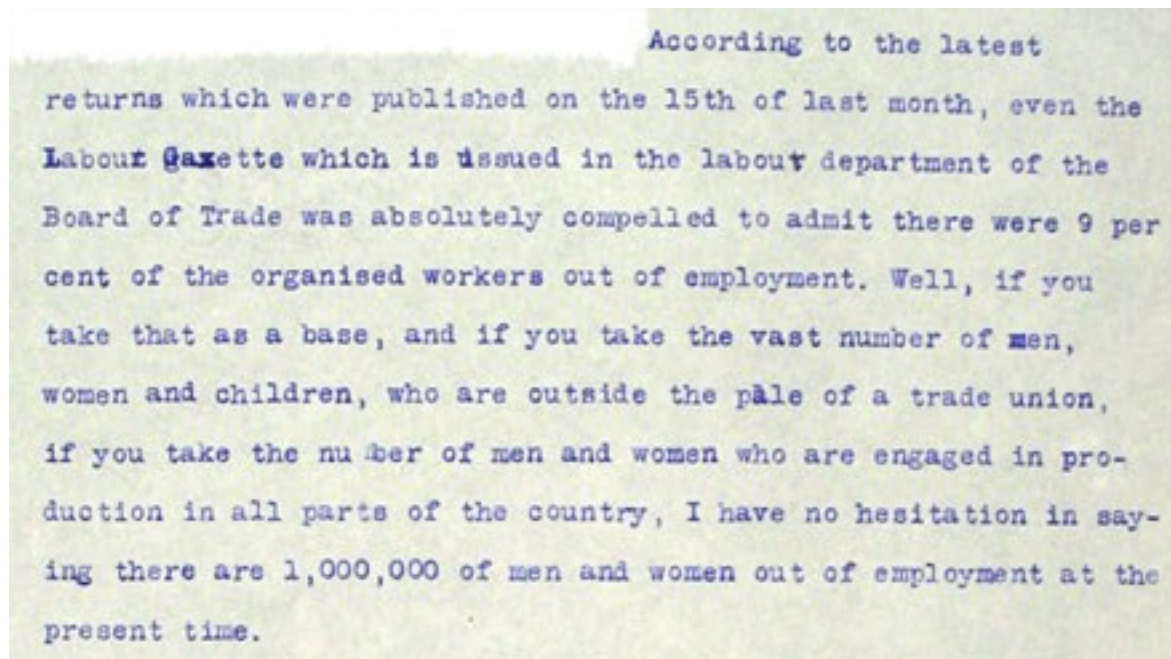
Extract from a speech made at a meeting of unemployed workers by the Labour MP Will Thorne in 1908 (MEPO 2/1221)

How to use this source to help you answer the Big Question :

You need to study the source carefully before you decide whether it supports or contradicts any of the reasons in the Big Question.

Ask Yourself:

- How great a problem was unemployment, according to government figures? 65 How great a problem did Will Thorne believe unemployment was?
- Do you find his arguments convincing?
- What problems does Will Thorne believe were facing the unions?
- How would the Liberal government have reacted to this speech?

Source 5A

According to the latest returns which were published on the 15th of last month, even the Labour Gazette which is issued in the labour department of the Board of Trade was absolutely compelled to admit there were 9 per cent of the organised workers out of employment. Well, if you take that as a base, and if you take the vast number of men, women and children, who are outside the pale of a trade union, if you take the number of men and women who are engaged in production in all parts of the country, I have no hesitation in saying there are 1,000,000 of men and women out of employment at the present time.

Transcript

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Source 5B

Let me tell you that one society - the pattern makers, the general Secretary declared to me the other day that so far as that Union alone was concerned they had 25 per cent of their members out of employment at the present time. And one day last week I received a letter from the late Secretary of the Society of Engineers - George Barnes - he said that the engineers were paying at the rate of 1s/4d per member per head per week of their contributions to men who are out of employment.

Then if you take the carpenters and joiners, they are paying many thousands of pounds more than what they have received in contributions during the past twelve months.

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Source 6

Extract from the report of the Central Body for Unemployed Workmen in London for the period 1908-09 (MH 63/13)

How to use this source to help you answer the Big Question :

You need to study the source carefully before you decide whether it supports or contradicts any of the reasons in the Big Question.

Ask Yourself:

- Does this source suggest that local authorities are not doing anything to help the unemployed?
- Does the source suggest that the government needs to take action on unemployment?
- According to the source, what should the government do about Labour Exchanges and why?
- If you were a member of the Liberal government would you regard the advice in this source as something to be listened to carefully?

Notes headed "Experience," prepared by the Special Committee of Chairmen, and incorporated in the Second Report of the Central Body, pages 64 and 65.

- (16) That the Central Body is of opinion that the experience of the last three years' work under the Act, and the work during the period of the London Unemp'oyed Fund, shows conclusively that it is impossible to deal adequately with unemployment by Local Authorities, and it is therefore of opinion that in any future legislation the question should be dealt with nationally.
- (17) That a State Department should set up and organise National Labour Exchanges throughout the country; and that, in addition to providing means for registering the unemployed, the Exchanges should act as means for discovering where work existed, and also for finding out as far ahead as possible when and where bad trade might be coming.

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Source 7

Extract from a report in 1909 to the British Cabinet by Winston Churchill on National Insurance and Labour Exchanges

(CAB 37/99/69)

How to use this source to help you answer the Big Question :

You need to study the source carefully before you decide whether it supports or contradicts any of the reasons in the Big Question.

Ask Yourself:

- According to Churchill, why will most of the labour of the country support the Labour Exchanges?
- What does Churchill see as the great advantage of combining Labour Exchanges and National Insurance? 70
- Is Churchill giving a balanced view of Labour Exchanges here?

1. I NOW circulate to my colleagues the Memorandum which has been prepared during the last six months in the Board of Trade on Unemployment Insurance. This Scheme is the counterpart and companion of the national system of Labour Exchanges to which the Cabinet has already assented.

The combination of a system of Unemployment Insurance with Labour Exchanges will make it certain that a very large proportion of the skilled and organized labour of the country, and some of its most powerful industries, will, from the outset, be associated with the Labour Exchanges; and, on the other hand, no scheme of Unemployment Insurance could be worked except in connection with an extensive apparatus for finding work, and testing willingness to work, like that afforded by national Labour Exchanges.

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Source 8

Extract from 'A Statistical Survey of the Problems of Pauperism'. This was an investigation carried out in 1910 into existing systems of helping the unemployed

(PRO 30/69/1824. Journal of the Royal Statistical Society, vol. LXXIV, Part 1, December 1910)

How to use this source to help you answer the Big Question :

You need to study the source carefully before you decide whether it supports or contradicts any of the reasons in the Big Question.

Ask Yourself:

- What trends are revealed in source 8a?
- If you were a government minister, would the trends in source 8a worry you?
- What does source 8b tell you about life for workers in trades like agriculture in times when trade was bad? 72
- Why are workers like carpenters and painters better off?
- What are the main concerns expressed in Source 8c?
- Does the author blame the poor law guardians?
- Do you think the author of this report would support the Liberals' plans for reform?

Source 8A

A STATISTICAL SURVEY
OF THE
PROBLEMS OF PAUPERISM.

The Presidential Address of the
Right Hon. LORD GEORGE HAMILTON, P.C., G.C.S.I.
Delivered before the Royal Statistical Society, November 15, 1910.

REPRINTED FROM THE JOURNAL OF THE ROYAL STATISTICAL SOCIETY
Vol. LXXIV, Part I (December, 1910).



(PRINTED FOR PRIVATE CIRCULATION.)

1911.

The number of paupers in each age-group in 1891 and 1906 is given in the Census of Paupers and they show that, since 1891, men have resorted to poor law institutions at earlier ages than formerly. There has been a progressive increase in the number of men over 20 in receipt of in-door relief, but the rate of male in-door pauperism to male population of the same ages was higher in 1901 than in 1891 at every age from 45 onwards, and the breach widens as age increases.

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Source 8B

Occupations of persons relieved.

Perhaps the most interesting of all the information we have obtained was that which related to the occupations or former occupations of the persons relieved. The groups of occupations in which the rate of adult male pauperism is above the average were "General and Undefined Workers and Dealers" (including general labourers), "Fishermen," "Agriculture," "Clothing Trades," and "Building Trades." The rates were lowest for carpenters and plumbers. In these branches the trades unions pay unemployed benefit which is not paid by any of the unions for other branches of the building trades except the Painters' Union.

The rate of pauperism among dock labourers is also very high and, generally speaking, the rate of pauperism is highest in those occupations in which the casual system of employment predominates. The six groups of occupations with the highest rate of male pauperism are :—

	<i>Per 1,000.</i>
General and undefined workers and dealers	84·9
Fishing	40·3
Agricultural: on farms, woods, and gardens.....	93·7
Dress	24·0
Building and works of construction	22·1
Conveyance of men, goods, and messages	20·3
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General rate for all male adults.... ..	21·3

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Source 8C

Taken in combination, they show a deplorable condition of affairs. We, the richest nation in Europe, have the heaviest pauperism, yet the more we spend, the worse the position seems to be. It is in London and the large towns, the supposed centres of progress, that the problems of pauperism are becoming more and more acute and difficult. It is adult pauperism that is on the increase. Is it not time to effect thorough changes in the methods and in the machinery of the administration which, in spite of the enormous cost, have achieved these untoward results?

I have no wish to attack or blame guardians as a body. Many of them are capable, hard-working men whose services would be most valuable in the new and enlarged sphere of public assistance which we proposed, on their abolition, to establish. They were suddenly brought into existence in 1834 to deal with conditions which have since passed away

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Summary and conclusions.

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