

How effective were the liberal reforms

Between 1900 and 1914 the British liberal government introduced the largest series of reforms ever completed by a government till that date. Prior to these reforms it was not considered the duty of the government to provide any form of relief for the poor and when the reforms were passed they were viewed as radical and amazing. Many conservatives considered them unenforceable and many radicals considered them far too small. Yet how effective were these reforms?

Prior to the reforms the only relief for children was either from charities or the workhouse, and many liberals claimed that the workhouses were worse than the conditions that many children had previously lived in. The first liberal reform for children was an act to allow schools to provide free school meals to those they felt needed them. This act meant that children would receive at least one meal a day and encourage them to attend school. The was voluntary though and many schools did not spend their budgets providing these meals. Only half of all schools set up these meal services. In 1907, the liberals introduced medical care to schools; this act meant that schools had to provide regular medical checks for children. These checks were extended to medical care in 1912. The liberals also banned the insuring of a child's life.

Before the reforms old people had to rely on their families or charity to avoid the workhouse or total poverty. The liberals introduced an old age pension for people over seventy years old and with no other income. They also introduced a married couples pension. Pensions were not a new thing but the most radical thing about these pensions was that they were entirely government funded. The pension was not incredibly large and the average working class person did not live to be 70 but for those who did the pension made them independent. In the year after the introduction 80000 people stopped claiming relief from charities.

The unemployed and underemployed had been left to find work themselves with little help. Some charities set up labour exchanges and these were very effective. The government took these and introduced government labour exchanges, these were very successful because men could simply sign themselves up as unemployed and wait for a job to come through. The underemployed were also aided by a new government scheme, when they were employed they contributed 2 ½ d of their earnings to the government; if they lost their job then they were paid for 10 weeks.

The national insurance act was introduced by the government as an aid to the sick, workers paid 4d of their wages to the government and in exchanges were insured against sickness. This meant that if a worker went sick he could claim sick pay and health care for a period of up to 25 weeks. Previously sickness had been a major cause of family poverty as if the worker became sick he would not be paid and the family would go hungry.

I think the most effective two reforms were national insurance and unemployment benefit. These were not the most generous reforms as they were both contributory but they helped the most important part of a family. The reforms for children and the elderly were non-contributory but they only helped the one particular person receiving

them. The national insurance act was so effective at keeping down poverty because previously if a worker fell sick his whole family suffered, now he would receive pay so the whole family benefited, this therefore benefited the elderly (the workers parents) his children and his wife rather than that worker individually. He unemployment reforms were so effective for the same reason. An unemployed worker makes no money so his whole family suffers. By putting people back into work the government benefited whole families of people.