

1) *What measures were introduced by The Liberal Government In the National Insurance Act?*

In 1911, The National Insurance Act was set up and consisted of two parts; one dealing with health insurance and the other with unemployment insurance. Health insurance covered all workers that earned £160 or less a year and it gave workers free medical care from a doctor and maternity benefit payments of 30shillings if a baby was born. The workers would have to pay 4d a week, employers would pay 3d a week and the government would add on 2d a week; so each worker paid 9d a week for the insurance, which was compulsory.

The unemployment act was set up to protect men in industries that were affected by seasonal unemployment. The workers would have to pay 2.5d a week and 2.5d a week from the employer. When these workers were temporarily unemployed, they could claim 7shillings a week for up to fifteen weeks.

2) *Why did Liberal Reforms provoke opposition?*

When the Liberal government came to power in 1906, they vowed to give support to those that were too poor to help themselves. The new government knew that this would be expensive, and so to obtain the money they needed to help the poor, they raised taxes. Many wealthy people were objected to raising taxes to help the poor, as they believed they were just being used to pay for the government's reforms. By giving the poor so much financial support, the rich believed that they would become lazy and would waste the money on tobacco, alcohol and other unnecessary goods.

Government opponents also criticised the old people's pensions, saying that it would discourage people from saving their wages for their retirement and that it would teach the British public to rely on financial handouts from the government, instead of relying on their own hard work and savings.

In 1911 the National Insurance Act was introduced and it became compulsory for workers to pay money from their wages every week, so they were insured. Because this scheme was compulsory, many workers objected to it and believed that the money they had earned was being stolen by the state.

3) *"The reforms of 1906-14 did much to alienate the worst effects of poverty." Do you agree?*

Between the years 1906 and 1914, the Liberals took steps to improve the health standards and the living and working conditions of the lower class. The government wanted to give support to the working class, many of whom were under the poverty line due to sickness or unemployment, their children and old age pensioners.

The first task undertaken by the new Liberal government was the welfare of children. Many lower class children were malnourished and weak because their parents could often not afford to feed them properly. To overcome this problem

the government introduced The School Meals Act of 1906, and this provided free school meals for the poor. The state also introduced free medical inspections in schools in 1907, insuring that all children would receive at least one medical inspection by a trained nurse or doctor, a year. This was introduced in order to reduce the outbreaks of disease, which were very frequent at the time.

Finally, the Children's act of 1908 introduced a consolidation of measures to deal with child neglect and abuse and set up juvenile courts and remand homes to remove child offenders from the adult courts and prisons.

The second target for the Liberals was the welfare of old age pensioners. Poverty was high as they had no successful financial backing from the government and could not make enough money working. The Old Age Pensions Act was introduced in 1908. The Act provided for pensions of 5s per week to be paid to those aged 70 or over who had annual incomes of £21 or less. So many people qualified for the pension, that some argued that the payments they received were so small that would not prevent poverty.

Many families fell below the poverty line because they did not receive a permanent income, due to unreliable employment. To help tackle this problem, The Labour Exchanges Act of 1909 was introduced to help the workers find permanent, reliable jobs. All over the country Labour exchanges were set up and the unemployed would make themselves known to them. If work became available, the exchanges would be told and they would then inform the unemployed workers.

If a worker unexpectedly lost their job, then the risk of them having to live in poverty was very high. So to try and deal with this problem, The National Insurance Act was introduced. The National Insurance Act was in two parts. Part one dealt with health insurance and part two with unemployment insurance. For health purposes all workers earning less than £160 a year were insured. A sickness benefit of 10s per week for 26 weeks was introduced, along with a 30s maternity grant. This act was a positive move by the Liberals towards reducing poverty, as due to health levels being so bad at the time many were left sick with no way of receiving money.

Unemployment insurance covered far less workers: mainly in construction trades, such as building and engineering, which were susceptible to fluctuating employment levels. This insurance also required payment from the worker. Weekly contributions were 2.5d each from workers, employers and the Government, which entitled the workers to a payment of 7s a week for up to a maximum of 15 weeks. Some believed that the policy was in fact encouraging poverty, as workers had a pay cut and were only covered for a maximum of 15 weeks, which meant after this period they would have no financial support. The help provided by this scheme was useful to the worker, as it meant they were not immediately poor. It therefore reduced the chances of poverty as people had 15 weeks to look for another source of income.

As soon as they came to power, the Liberal government immediately introduced reforms, to try and support the lower class, many of whom lived in poverty and were given no financial aid to help them.

Although they did not create a welfare state or solve poverty, the Liberals did reduce the chances of poverty for working class families and old aged people, with such legislation as the National Insurance Act and Pensions for old aged people. The introduction of health inspections, food provision and juvenile courts for children helped to reduce the numbers of homeless, sick and hungry children. They also gave help to workers, who because of no fault of their own, were earning either nothing, or very little.

I believe that the measures introduced by the government, did not deal with the poor, but were aimed to prevent even more poverty.