

What was the focus of the social reform and why was this?

The main focus of the social reform was aimed at the ill-treated children, the future of Britain.

The liberals abandoned the old, traditional method of governing known as "laissez faire" and took on a more socialist stance. The Laissez Faire made the rich, richer and the poor, poorer. It was a system in which the government had previously thought that the poor were poverty stricken because they were lazy and could not save. However powerful evidence from Rowntree's survey suggested that this was not the case.

Soldiers sent to the Boer war could not fight because of rickets and other side effects of malnutrition.

Unemployment figures were increased due to foreign competition, this caused crime such as theft and prostitution and not only riots but also this was a loss to the economy. The economy suffered because workers could not produce much output, "The American worker is a stronger, larger, healthier, better fed and consequentially a more efficient animal"

The government's response to this was a series of acts known as the social welfare reforms, which were first step towards improving general health, unemployment and ultimately the standard of living.

This included the Workman's compensation act which required employers to pay compensation for injuries sustained at work from unsafe or unhealthy conditions.

The old age pension act gave money to those married and over 70 earning less than a certain amount. This showed that the government took Rowntree's survey into consideration, understanding that it was extremely hard to climb out of poverty. However at this time life expectancy was only 50-55 and 70 was the age at which you be entitled to pension. This was very unhelpful because not many would live to qualify for a pension.

The fact that the unemployed not only harmed themselves but also the economy, was enough incentive to set up labour exchanges, an employment agency, which was introduced by the Labour Exchanges Act 1909.

The Trade Boards Act 1909 raised the standard of living in Britain by improving working conditions, which was done by preventing long hours, low pay and poor conditions. This however was not entirely successful because of the desperate nature of people to get a job.

The government recognised that children were the future of Britain, and therefore a lot of laws were legislated to make life better for them.

The School Meals Act 1906 meant that every child was given at least one good meal a day in school. However not every child got a meal, but for those that it did, it was a step forward.

Every local education authority had to set up a school medical service, but because this was run by the local authorities, it was up to them how it was

run, how much money was invested in it, and therefore service varied widely across the country.

To deter parents from neglecting their children, it was now possible that they could be prosecuted in court under The Children Act 1908. They were also forbidden to smoke cigarettes or go into pubs. Many large families needed their children to work to add to the household income. To work children had to miss out on their precious education. To avoid going into jobs with low pay, bad conditions, etc.. the government provided vocational training.

The government had taken into account that the children were going to be the ones running Britain in the future. They referred to them as "assets to society". They would grow up to be the workforce. These children reforms will mean that the new working population will be fit and healthy able to produce a high output, a good economy therefore a prosperous nation. The difference between the children's reform and the others was that it was long-term. Therefore the main focus of the social reform was the children.

Antony Thambiah