

How important was new Liberal ideology in leading to the welfare reforms of 1905-11?

In answering this essay it is probably best to understand what is meant by ideology. Ideology is defined as a set of beliefs and aims by a group or groups of individuals who share the same common views. The word 'liberal' means being 'free.' The Liberal party is seen as a party that has an open mind over issues and follows what the majority of people want.

In this essay I will explain the key issues that might have led to the Liberal party implementing these welfare reforms in Britain between 1905-11.

'New' something '-ism' is often just a name given by a party to show that their ideologies have evolved from previous, outdated times. 'New' Liberal ideology is looked at in the context of older Liberal beliefs. This idea of renaming the ideology of a party was seen as an attempt by a party to gain support by claiming to bring in new, unique policies (Simon Potter). However, these thoughts cannot be used when referring to 'New Liberalism.' Under the leadership of politicians such as Asquith, Churchill and Lloyd-George the Liberal party seemed to break away from its past. In fact, in 1906 after two decades of political failure, the Liberal party came to power. It introduced the biggest number of social reforms of its time in Britain. It is the reasons behind these reforms that I will be looking at.

The main difference between 'Old' Liberal thinking and 'New Liberalism' was that more emphasis was put on collectivism rather than individualism, which had previously been preached. People began to change their minds from earlier thinking and began to believe that it was the government's duty to improve life for the community. These ideas as well as those of positive liberty only seemed to appeal to a small minority of Liberal ministers. However, it did appeal to influential Liberals that were in power. This included the future Prime Minister Herbert Asquith.

It is my belief that increased knowledge of poverty was more important than new Liberal ideology (aka New Liberalism). Many people in Britain were poverty stricken or in need for help. The government needed to find out exactly how people were getting into poverty. Seebohm Rowntree, a historian in the 19th-20th Century, carried out a survey into poverty in York. York was more typical of the whole country rather than the East End. Seebohm calculated a poverty line (minimum income necessary to stay out of poverty) based on scientific calculations. Those people that did not have the minimum income were in **primary poverty** and could not achieve physical efficiency.

He discovered that those people who were in **secondary poverty** were there because they hadn't spent their money well enough. Seebohm's statistical figures and results opened the eyes of many in Britain. It made many people realise how poverty had come about and how

The liberal party believed that welfare reforms would make Britain more competitive and efficient with foreign countries such as Germany and USA. Britain was less advanced than these two superpowers in their army, in industry and in education. Some believed that changes to the education system and administration would make Britain on a more equal level with the two above-mentioned countries. Others believed that sorting out poverty and health would improve Britain's national efficiency. Liberals believed that welfare reforms would help improve the standard of

living of the poorer classes. These people tended to be unfit and therefore were unable to join the army. It was also the poorer people who wanted to become soldiers. By improving the lives and health of poor people, then more would be accepted into the army. Therefore, this is one area that would become more efficient and competitive. Changes to health and child reforms would also make Britain more efficient. Children were Britain's future prospects. By improving all aspects of their lives (especially those that were coming from poorer backgrounds), children would help Britain to become an all round superpower in 30-40 years to come. They were arguably the most needy of welfare reforms, which maybe explains why the Liberal party implemented many reforms regarding them between 1905-11.



The need to win working class support and beat off challenges from the Labour party was the most important reason for the introduction of Welfare reforms between 1905-11. New Liberalism was based on political beliefs, but the need to resist the Labour parties potential challenge was based on political advantages. The 1903 Lib-Lab pact made Labour more of a threat on the political stage. They gained there most number of seats in Parliament in the 1906 elections and with the support of the majority of the working class and the Trade Unions; the labour party were proving to be capable opposition.