

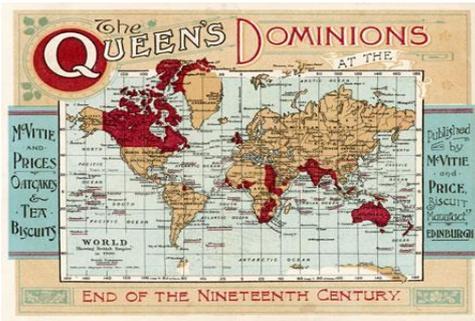
# Britain 1851-1951

## Issue 4 Notes



HIGHER ISSUE 4	FACTORS
<b>An Evaluation of the reasons why the Liberals introduced social welfare reforms, 1906-14.</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Concerns over poverty - the social surveys of Booth and Rowntree.</li> <li>• Municipal socialism</li> <li>• Foreign examples &amp; National efficiency</li> <li>• Fears over national security</li> <li>• The rise of New Liberalism</li> <li>• Party advantage and the rise of Labour.</li> </ul>
<b>National 5 Issue 1</b>	
<b>Divided society: poverty, housing; politics</b>	<p>The problem of poverty at the turn of the century</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Belief in self-help</li> <li>• The voluntary system</li> <li>• The surveys of Booth and Rowntree</li> <li>• Changing attitudes towards poverty and its causes.</li> </ul>

## Introduction: Britain by 1900



By 1900 Britain had control of a large empire, with land all across the globe. A powerful navy controlled the seas across which British ships traded. The navy ensured that no other country was able to seriously challenge Britain's power. Britain was one of the first countries to industrialise. This meant that a wide variety of products and goods were now made in factories in Britain and were much cheaper to buy. Industries included, iron, coal, steel and textiles. The Industrial Revolution brought wealth and importance to Britain. Some people became extremely wealthy;

there was a growing middle class and skilled working class although many working classes lived in poverty. Politics was dominated by Conservative and Liberal Parties which meant wealth was in the hands of small group.

Before 1906, there was almost no help available for poor people in Britain. The main government attitude of the time was "LASSIEZ FAIRE" meaning the state should not interfere in the lives of the people or in the economy.

A Poor Law System existed which was a system of help provided for the poor. This usually resulted in people being put in a workhouse (Poor house in Scotland). The harsh conditions, but above all the shame of the workhouse, meant some people starved rather than enter it. The Poor Law operated a mixture of indoor and outdoor relief. This is help given to the poor in a workhouse or poorhouse.

Conditions in the workhouse were poor:

- The work provided for the inmates of the workhouse was boring and very repetitive.
- Families were segregated to different parts of the building. Children, adult males and females could not live together within the workhouse walls.
- Food was very poor, unappetising and often inadequate. Meat was only given twice a week. The diet was often not enough. For example in 1845 at a workhouse in Andover, starving paupers were discovered eating the marrow from the animal bones that had been supplied to the workhouse for crushing.
- No talking was allowed during meal times; no alcohol or tobacco were permitted
- Cards and other games were not allowed
- Strict hours for getting up, working and going to bed were enforced
- Some workhouses were worse than prison and there was often a very high mortality rate.
- In 1862, 23% of the inmate's resident in Scotland's poorhouse died during the course of the year

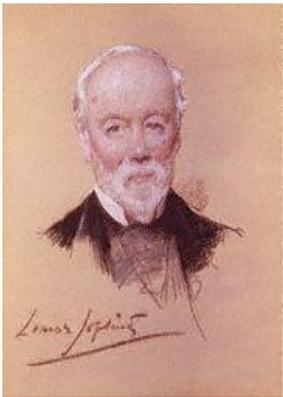


The Poor Law System was harsh as many people at the time believed that if you went to a workhouse you had obviously failed to look after yourself or your family properly. Asking for help at a workhouse was seen as a sign of failure of character. If you could not look after yourself and your family, you must be either lazy or wasting too much money on drink and gambling. The poor were expected to look after themselves by saving money, living a sober life and working hard.

The government was also worried that if too much help was provided by the government for the poor, this would encourage the poor not to look for work. Living on government help would be seen as being easier than getting a job. This would become very expensive as more poor people would rely on government help rather than their own efforts to escape poverty.

# Attitudes towards Poverty before 1906

## Self Help:



Most people believed self-help was the best way to avoid poverty. Samuel Smiles believed that effort and positive thinking could make anything possible and encouraged people to improve themselves through hard work. Samuel Smiles was a qualified doctor from Edinburgh University. He warned against the government helping people too much. This help was bad because it made men helpless. He thought the role of government should be very limited. This belief in self-help was important because it led many people in to believe that poverty could be beaten by positive thinking and hard work alone. Smiles said that the average worker could avoid poverty by working hard and saving some of their wages. These savings could be used whenever the worker was out of a job, or became unable to work because of illness or

old age. Smiles thought there was no need for the government to become involved in providing for the poor. It was the duty of people to look after themselves. Those that did not were either idle, unwilling to save or drunks.

Self Help worked for those members of the working class who had a regular income, large enough to allow savings to be made. These workers tended to be skilled. There were many places where they could save money to provide for illness, unemployment and old age.

- Friendly Societies – partnership association for the purposes of insurance, pensions, savings or banking. These were the most popular way in which people helped themselves. Benefits were given out based on the contributions an individual made. By the 1890s it was estimated that 8 million people had made some sort of contribution to a Friendly Society. Most Friendly Societies also ran social activities such as an annual parade or gala day.
- Savings Banks – popular with servants and those saving for their children. There were even 'penny saving banks' which were aimed at the very poor who could only save very small amounts of money. The increasing numbers who used these banks during the 19<sup>th</sup> century was a good sign, according to some. Savings meant people had money at times of difficulty. It also encouraged good habits such as saving and living within a budget. The Post Office also opened savings accounts. These were extremely popular with 663,000 accounts opening between 1863 and 1868. They grew to 5,776,000 by the 1890s.
- Co-operative Movement - Members of the working class helped themselves by forming Co-Operative Societies. This involved a community getting together to provide low cost food and services for themselves. For example, a grocery store or funeral parlour. Not everyone liked the idea of self-help. Those who were critical of self-help pointed out that not all people could save for a 'rainy day'. Lack of education and poor health also stopped many people improving their lives. It was not possible for everybody to improve their life by positive thinking alone.
- Relatives



## Charities:

To fill the gap in the welfare system a host of charities sprung up (640 by 1861). In 1867 the COS (Charity Organisation Society) was formed to "attack the problem of poverty". Work done by charities included: giving money to the poor, giving time to the poor and providing some

particular expense to help the poor. Many of these charities such as the RSPCA, Dr Barnardo's and the Salvation Army continue to exist today. There were a huge number of charities. One survey of London in 1861 identified no fewer than 640 charitable organisations helping the poor. This helped ranged from hospitals for the ill and orphanages, to Bible missionary activities. Private charity in the 18<sup>th</sup> and 19<sup>th</sup> century was far more important than the Poor Law in the day-to-day relief of poverty. In Scotland, charities were even more important as the official Poor Law only gave help to a very small group of the poor. The only groups to get help would be the old, the young and the disabled. The 1897 report of the Annual Conference of the Charity Organisation Society stated that Glasgow charities raised £1 million per year whilst the Edinburgh charities raised £250,000 per year.

Most charities providing help for the poor were frequently organised by well meaning middle class men and women. Motivations included:

- Fear that the poor would rise up against those wealthier than themselves in revolution. Charity would stop this.
- Genuine Christian concern.
- Opportunity for middle class women to get involved in public life.
- Desire to help the poor lead a better life.
- Most people who ran charities were strong believers in Samuel Smiles and did not think poverty was the result of circumstances out with a person's control but by the poor having some sort of personal failing.
- The urban middle class were becoming more aware of how adequate the Poor Law was.



A typical example of the well-meaning individual who provided charity was that of Octavia Hill. Octavia Hill was a middle-class lady who was interested in the link between poverty and bad housing. She believed that slums were created because landlords did not care about maintaining their properties. Octavia Hill also thought that tenants in these properties helped create these slums by their bad behaviour and willingness to live in squalor. Hill tried to change this by managing property in a better way. She made sure that the properties she managed were well maintained. In return she expected her tenants to pay their rent on time and to live respectable and responsible lives. Octavia Hill thought that charitable help should include education of the poor in how to lead better lives as well as practical help. She thought that this education work was best done by people like herself. Octavia Hill was totally against government help for the poor. Hill's ideas were very common among those who provided charity. They felt that they were responsible for improving the way the poor led their lives. People such as Hill tended to be members of the Charity Organisation Society. The COS felt that the type of help given should relate to the particular circumstances of the person seeking help. They also thought that charity must do more than simply give help; the help must have a purpose.

There were other reasons for starting charities. Many charity leaders were religious. One of the most famous was William Booth. In 1861 Booth started the Salvation Army. To begin with he hoped to save souls by converting the poor to God. But he came to believe that his religious campaign would never be successful unless poverty was ended. He hoped to achieve this by setting up work colonies where the poor could be retrained and live more productive lives.

# An Evaluation of the reasons why the Liberals introduced social welfare reforms, 1906-14

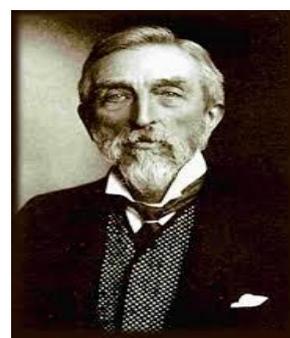
## The Social Surveys of Booth and Rowntree:

The social surveys are the starting point for explaining why the reforms were passed. Social reformers like Charles Booth (in London) and Seebohm Rowntree (in York) carried out detailed studies into the lives of the poor. Their results were truly shocking and also showed just how bad life was for the very poor – terrible housing, poor health, bad diet and an endless struggle just to feed the family. Before the results of the surveys had been published it was believed poverty was very low, around 3% and most poverty was self-inflicted through poor-choices such as wasting money on things like alcohol, and gambling. The surveys changed popular opinion on the causes of poverty and dispelled the ideas that most poverty was self-inflicted. The surveys also proved that there were definite causes of poverty, this, in turn proved there could also be definite cures.

### Booth and Rowntree:

At the end of the 19th century two social surveys were published that not only shocked the British public but changed popular opinion on the causes of poverty.

Charles Booth was a London Businessman who originally was a Liverpool ship owner. At first he believed that the level of poverty in B retain was limited and could be dealt with by charity. In common with most people of his class, he thought that if people were poor it was their own fault. He carried out his survey in the East End of London and published his results in 1899 *Life and Labour of the People of London*. His book showed that 30% of London's population lived in extreme poverty that poverty was so bad that only the government could help and that if nothing was done, Britain was on the brink of a socialist Revolution. His recommendations clearly stated that the government needed to intervene or they could face a backlash from the poor working class. Booth's work was important for a number of reasons:



- His method of working was important. He used scientific methods and put people into recognisable social classes.
- He worked out a 'poverty line' (a level of income that was needed in order for a family to stay just beyond a life of starvation).
- He provided statistics that showed how widespread poverty was.
- The scale of the poverty he uncovered could not be met by charitable aid alone.

#### Population Classification

A	<b>The lowest class -wasters and semi-criminals</b>
B	<b>The very poor – casual labour, hand to mouth existence.</b>
C and D	<b>The poor – including those whose earnings are small, because of irregular employment and those whose work is lowpaid.</b>
E and F	<b>The regularly employed and fairly paid working class of all grades.</b>
G and H	<b>Lower and upper middle class and all above these levels.</b>

Seebohm Rowntree was a member of a wealthy chocolate manufacturing family from York. After reading about Booth's work on poverty in London, Rowntree decided to see if the level of poverty in York was different to that in London. Rowntree published his study of York to identify if the problem of poverty was as bad in the towns of Britain. In his study of 1901, *Poverty, a Study*



of *Town Life*, he found that 30% of York's population lived in poverty, that there was a 'poverty line' of the basic minimum amount a family needed to survive and that there were certain times that individuals were more likely to fall into poverty – most importantly old age. His study was important because of the methods he used to carry out his study. Rowntree identified two types of poverty. Primary poverty was used to describe those whose earnings were enough to live on but who spent money in a wasteful way.

Their findings agreed on some key points:

- Up to 30% or almost 1/3 of the population of the cities were living on or below poverty levels.
- The conditions were such that people could not pull themselves out of poverty by their own actions alone. Poverty was not self-inflicted.
- Booth and Rowntree both identified the main causes of poverty as being illness, unemployment and age- both the very young and the old were at risk of poverty.

This shows that politicians now had statistical evidence to which showed that no matter how hard people tried, they could not lift themselves out of poverty and the government would need to act to help them. In addition, the surveys helped promote the idea of a 'deserving poor' those who were trying to lift themselves out of poverty which was an important theme of the liberal reforms and started to break down old ideas that poor people were lazy, ignorant and squandered their money. However, it is important to remember that there were many people, MPs included, who challenged the surveys and still believed that poverty was not widespread and that poor people wasted their money on alcohol and gambling which caused them to be poor. In addition, poverty in rural areas was ignored by the surveys as they focussed only on inner-city areas like London and York.

## Municipal Socialism

By the second half of the nineteenth century the public had become used to local (municipal) authorities taking an increased role in their lives. Some local authorities used local taxes to make improvements, with taxes based on an individual's wealth. For this reason local author action came to be known as Municipal Socialism. The most famous example was Joseph Chamberlain, Mayor of Birmingham who made various improvements to the city, paid for by local taxation. He bought the waterworks and gas works, cleared the worst slums, and built better housing. The fact that Municipal Socialism was successful and popular in Birmingham raised the possibility that it could work on a larger, national level. This laid the ground for Liberal reforms as it proved that government intervention could benefit citizens.



Following the cholera epidemics of 1842 and 1853, those responsible for running the city and shaping its future accepted the link doctors had highlighted between dirt and disease. There were a number of influencing figures dubbed "Glasgow's City Fathers." Flour merchant John Ure was behind the driving force to regulate sanitary conditions and eradicate the city's filthy environment. Lord Provost John Blackie was largely responsible for the 1866 City Improvement Act. It introduced the scheme to bring a clean water supply into the city with the opening of the Loch Katrine project. Gas and electricity systems followed. City Fathers under the management of James Dalrymple, provided public transport including a tramway network. Wholesale grocer Samuel Chisholm and coal exporter Daniel M. Stevenson worked towards providing housing provision for the poor. Glasgow city council also got involved and by 1850 controlled Glasgow's water and by 1860 their gas and street lighting. Public works schemes to improve living conditions and public health had been established in the late 19th century, often set up and run by Liberals. These small, local schemes raised the possibility of similar schemes being a success on a national scale. The efforts of municipal socialism were around long before the government got involved, however the gradual introduction of intervention allowed people to warm to the idea. Experiences of municipal socialism encouraged the reforms because people became accustomed to government intervention. The municipal efforts helped in promoting what the government could provide for the country as a whole.

However, we must remember that the local model was not able to change the minds of everybody in terms of government intervention. There remained huge opposition in Britain to the idea of taxing the wealthy more to provide for the poor – particularly from the upper classes and middle classes who resented losing out financially to provide for the needy.

## Fears over National Security:

### The Boer War (1899 - 1902)



Britain became involved in a war in South Africa, which was part of the British Empire at the time. The British army were fighting to keep the colony in British hands, and were up against Dutch farmers (Boers) who wanted independence. The British thought that the war would be over quickly. However, Boer fighters were well trained, equipped and led, and the war dragged on for three years. Eventually, Britain had to use 400,000 troops to defeat Boer forces that totalled just 35,000. The war was a great shock to British confidence.

People searched for answers as to why it had taken 3 years for professional soldiers to defeat a force of Boer farmers.

The poor quality of soldiers was blamed for how Britain did in the war. In some towns as many as 9 out of 10 recruits for the army were rejected because they were so unfit. The Boer War (1889-1902) was not a conscript war. Thousands volunteered, and the poor health of the nation was highlighted when, it was found that a third of army recruits were unfit for service. In some industrial areas, two out of every three recruits did not pass the basic army medical exam. In Manchester 8,000 out of 11,000 would-be volunteers were turned away! Almost 25% of volunteers were rejected on fitness grounds.

Worse still, it appeared that Britain had lost its military supremacy as the supposedly mighty power; she had some difficulty in defeating a relatively small number of Boer farmers. The lack of military efficiency on the battlefield and the physical inadequacies of the recruits led to the realisation the government would have to take some responsibility for the health of the nation.

The mishaps of the Boer War brought great concerns for the security of Britain against her rivals, especially an increasingly militaristic Germany who was after her own 'place in the sun.' The recruits for the Boer War exposed the awful condition of Britain's population. It became evident that those living in towns and cities were more prone to ill health. People soon began to question if Britain could survive a war never mind win one against a stronger enemy if its 'fighting stock' was so unhealthy. These concerns during the Boer War and over Germany were a definite motive for reform because if Britain did not have a fit and healthy workforce then they would not be able to compete in future wars such as the one looming with Germany or retain their status as a 'Great Power'. The very earliest reforms in 1906/7 (free school meals and medical inspections) are generally considered a direct result of the fears over national security and efficiency.

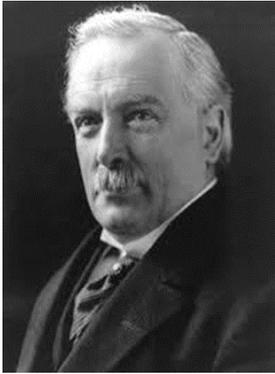
As a result of the shocking statistics exposed by the lack of suitable recruits during the Boer War the government formed the Interdepartmental Committee on Physical Deterioration; its sole purpose was to examine the physical health of the population of England, Ireland and Wales. Scotland created a similar committee. The results were published in 1904 and the investigation discovered that problems resulted from malnutrition and overcrowding, thus, free school meals and medical checks were recommended. The statistics had a direct effect on the reforms as they were among the first to be addressed in order to improve the poor health of the nation. However, many historians have challenged this view that politicians had any genuine concern for the welfare of the poor and instead wanted to pass reforms for political advantage – such as Churchill making a name for himself or the liberal party wanting to gain working class votes over Labour.

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## New Liberalism:

Traditional "Old" Liberal politicians firmly believed in laissez-faire. They argued that the individual should look after him or herself. However by the 1900s some Liberals were thinking that self-help had failed. These were called 'New Liberals'. They argued that the government should become involved in helping people.

The Liberal Government was led by Henry Campbell-Bannerman until his death in 1908. Then Herbert Asquith took over as Prime Minister. The two most important New Liberals in the government were Winston Churchill and David Lord George.



New Liberals, such as Lloyd George, Winston Churchill and Herbert Asquith, argued that there were circumstances in which it was right for the state to intervene in people's lives. They represented poorer areas – e.g. Lloyd George in Wales and Winston Churchill in Dundee. Lloyd George came from a poor background and was determined to introduce meaningful social reforms. He supported the work of Booth and Rowntree and accepted their findings when he listed the causes of poverty. Lloyd George and



Churchill in particular felt genuine concern over the harsh reality faced by those in poverty and wanted to replace the old fashioned governing style of 'laissez faire' with effective welfare reforms.

This shows that 'New Liberalism' was becoming more influential within the ruling party due to the more modern and interventionist ideas of new Liberals like Churchill and Lloyd George and the party was reforming from within and starting to believe that reform was necessary to help those in need.

However, historians have pointed out that the new Liberals were still vastly outnumbered by 'old' laissez-faire Liberals. Opposition still existed towards the New Liberals; traditional Liberal Harold Cox believed the New Liberals were giving "something for nothing". Cox's opinion proved unpopular, with many welcoming reform and improvement, or those opposed keeping quiet in order to succeed politically. It was only when 'old Liberal' Campbell Bannerman died in 1908 that the new Liberals were able to introduce their interventionist ideas when Asquith replaced him as Prime Minister. Asquith said "**The experience of our own and every other progressive country had shown that there were wants, needs, services which could not be safely left to the unregulated operation of the forces of supply and demand, and for which only the community as a whole could make adequate and effective provision**".

Asquith needed to balance his cabinet and so Lloyd George and Churchill were appointed to senior positions which allowed the voice of the New Liberals to be heard clearly. Lloyd George became Chancellor of the Exchequer and Winston Churchill became Home Secretary. The Liberal Government of 1906 contained leading progressives; therefore some sort of change was bound to happen as a result. The New Liberal policies were not published widely in the 1906 campaign and it was only after that reform was introduced. Some historians take this as evidence that Lloyd George and Churchill were not as committed to social reform as they claimed to be.



## Party Advantage and the Rise of Labour:

In the 1890s, membership of trade unions grew from 1.6 million to just over 2 million members. Unions now represented not only skilled craft workers, but also unskilled and semi-skilled workers. In the 1890s, there were several big strikes. Employers used the law to punish trade unions by making them pay the cost of the strikes. Trade unions were frustrated that the Liberals and the Conservatives didn't seem able to help them so they gave their support for a new Labour Party. The trade union movement hoped that the Labour party would do more to help ordinary working-class people. This put pressure on the Liberals and Conservatives to develop their own social reforms if they wanted to keep the votes of the working class.

The Labour Party was newly established in 1900 and it was winning public support for its campaigns for social welfare policies, such as old age pensions and unemployment benefits. The ruling Liberal Party recognised the threat this new party posed to its traditional support in many working class areas. They needed to offer something similar to woo the working class male voters. The Labour party already had the support of working males through its affiliation with the Trade Unions and this was a threat to the ruling Liberal party. Many socialists felt strongly that the government should do more to deal with poverty in Britain. The young Labour Party was in support of socialism.

To counter the threat from the socialist and Labour movement, the Liberals realised that they had to introduce social reforms or risk losing political support from the working classes so they tried to 'buy off' voters with smaller reforms to avoid bigger ones e.g. offered pensions but raised the age limit to 70 years old. However, many historians have pointed out that the Liberals cannot have been truly worried by the Labour promises otherwise they would have matched or bettered the Labour party by offering pensions earlier. Labour party were still very small in 1906 (29 seats) so probably did not pose a threat in terms of winning an electoral majority.



terms of winning an electoral majority.

A key debate of the 1906 election is that the Liberals passed the reforms not out of compassion, but for their political advancement. In 1884 the franchise was extended to include working class men, the Liberal party attracted many of these new voters, but these votes were needed in order for the Liberals to succeed against the Conservatives. It was therefore to the political advantage of the Liberal government to offer social reform, even if they did not fully believe in the principle of government intervention. The growth of the Labour Party meant that the Liberals had to compete to keep their working-class support. Neither Lloyd George nor Churchill campaigned in favour of social reform, thus, they must have been driven by some form of personal advancement.

Historians have questioned the extent of the new Liberals compassion. Robert Blake asks the following of Lloyd George **"Was he a man of principle pursuing by devious means a consistent end, or was he an opportunist who relied upon his intuition to gratify at every turn his love for power and office"**? However, even if he was genuinely committed to social reform, he had spoken out in 1904 against the threat of Labour claiming that the Liberals might be "practically wiped out" by the Labour Representative Committee. Regardless of his motives, it can be argued that the Liberals were clearly aware of the threat of the Labour Party and the possibility reform would gain them votes was evidently a factor in encouraging the Liberals to reform. Nevertheless, the Conservatives had already introduced a number of reforms in areas such as Housing and Education, thus it can be argued reform would be inevitable for the party next elected.

# Historiography

## **Social Survey of Booth & Rowntree:**

Social investigators such as Booth and Rowntree *"focused attention on the deep-seated reasons for deprivation, about which poor people could do little unaided: low wages, sickness, old age, raising children"*.

Graham Goodlad

*"New Liberalism was given a powerful impetus by the revelations of Booth and Rowntree"*.

Peter Murray

## **National Security:**

*"A vast population has been created by the factory and industrial systems, the majority of whom is incapable of bearing arms"*.

A. White

*"The high proportion of army volunteers from the large towns rejected as physically unfit appeared to confirm the alarming findings of Booth and Rowntree"*.

A. Sykes

## **New Liberalism:**

*"New Liberalism stood for increased taxes on the rich in order to finance state intervention on behalf of the poor"*.

Peter Murray

*"I see little glory in an Empire which can rule the waves and is unable to flush its sewers"*.

Winston Churchill

*"The cause of the Liberal Party is the cause of the left-out millions"*.

Winston Churchill

*"After all, this is a rich country. It is the richest country under the sun; and yet in this rich country you have hundreds and thousands of people living under conditions of poverty, destitution and squalor that would, in the words of an old Welsh poet, make the rocks weep"*.

David Lloyd George

*"It was Lloyd George and Churchill in partnership who carried Asquith's Government forward into a progressive and active social policy"*.

Derek Fraser

## **Rise of Labour Party/Political Advantage:**

*"Some reforms ... can be directly traced to Labour Party pressure. Fear of 'socialism' may well have encouraged the Liberals to bring forward their own reforms, so that there would be no need for the masses to turn to Labour"*.

Graham Goodlad

*"The 1906 election provided the Liberals with the chance to show that there was a party of concern and conscience which could legislate in the interest of the poor and that there was no need for a party designated to this one sole interest in society"*. Derek Fraser

*“Political historians have commonly seen the Liberals’ reforms of 1906-14 as a pragmatic and doomed attempt at propping up their increasingly threatened position on the left of British politics”.*

Duncan Tanner

## **Example Higher Extended Response Questions**

**(Worth 22 marks each)**

1. How important were the **social surveys of Booth and Rowntree**\* in the Liberal government's decision to introduce social reforms, 1906-1914?
2. To what extent did the Liberal government of 1906-1914 introduce social reform due to the **social surveys of Booth and Rowntree**\*?
3. To what extent was the **drive of the New Liberals**\* the main motivation behind the Liberal reforms of 1906-14?

\* In each of these questions there is an “isolated factor” – it could be replaced with any of the factors we have discussed in Issue 4.