

Issue 1 – Why did Britain become more democratic between 1867 and 1928?

The big picture

This issue really focuses on the pressures that caused Britain to become more democratic. Because this issue starts in 1867 and ends in 1928 – two significant dates for voting rights – this chapter looks mainly at the reasons for giving more people the right to vote, also known as franchise reform. Each reform of the franchise was the result of different pressures and it is only in hindsight that we see an apparently linked sequence of reforms that extended the franchise in Britain. This section looks at the pressures that caused those changes.

Economic and social change as pressures for reform

During the 19th century and early 20th century there were huge social and economic changes happening in Britain. These changes did not cause any one reform but were part of changes sweeping across Britain that led to pressure for change and then change itself. A new word to consider is **overarching**. Like an arch that reaches over many things, overarching reasons are those that led to many changes. These social and economic overarching reasons can also be called long-term reasons for change. For example, changes in the British population (called demographic change) had effects on the political system right through the 19th century. The changes such as urbanisation (growing size of towns) did not immediately cause political change but led to the pressures for change.

On the other hand, short-term change is much more directly linked to cause and effect. In other words, because something happened then a political change happened soon afterwards that was directly caused by the first change.

The industrial revolution changed the way people worked, where they lived, how they travelled around the country and even how they felt about their position in society.

Long-term pressures for change

The effect of a changing population

Demographic change means changes in the British population. Not only did the population grow but also the population distribution changed. This means where people lived changed and the main change is that more and more people left rural areas and moved into towns. By the 1850s, for the first time ever, the population in towns in England equalled the population in the countryside. In Scotland the change was slower but by 1900 migration from the Borders and the Highlands and Islands to the central belt had created the same situation. By 1950 Scotland's urban population was far bigger than its rural population.

The effect of the industrial revolution

For hundreds of years political power was in the hands of people who owned vast areas of the land of Britain. They were the most wealthy and most powerful people in Britain. The industrial revolution changed that. The new wealth lay with factory owners, mine owners and those involved in trade and business. The wealthy middle class now wanted a say in the running of the country. They argued that because they were the new wealth creators of the country they should have more of a say in the running of the country.

More effects of urbanisation and industrialisation

Another pressure for change caused by urbanisation and industrialisation (work based more in huge factories and mines) was the growing class awareness of the working classes. They realised that they too were wealth creators yet had no power at all to change anything. Yet in cities the working classes saw thousands of people in the same situation as themselves. Perhaps, if they united, change could be achieved.

You will find out about the Reform Acts of 1867 and 1884 and also touch on the First Reform Act of 1832. The link between social and economic change and these reforms is that in 1832 greater influence was given to the middle class and by 1867 the vote was given to the skilled working class in towns. In 1884 rural workers were included. These changes all show the drift of power to urban industrial Britain – the long-term overarching reasons were having an effect.

The social and economic changes in 19th century Britain also had an effect on the power of the land-owning rich. Put simply, their power declined. Other changes such as the Secret Ballot took away the power of the old authority to bully the new voters while the redistribution of seats in 1867, 1885 and 1919 recognised that political power now lay with the people of Britain and the majority lived in towns. The old fashioned idea that land owners should rule Britain simply because they owned the land had died by 1900.

Short-term reasons for change

The 1867 Reform Act – in any answer about franchise reform you must also be able to deal with the more immediate short-term reasons for change. Historians tend to identify several short-term reasons for the 1867 Second Reform Act, some more important than others.

These reasons are:

- Growing support for new ideologies
- Political advantage
- Political inevitability
- The effect of war
- Pressure groups
- Increasing respectability of the lower orders

Reason 1 – Growing support for new ideologies

By the mid 19th century political ideas of Liberalism (the right of individuals to express their opinions freely) and democracy (the right of adults to choose the governments that ruled them) were becoming more widespread and accepted. In the USA and in Europe struggles were taking place for liberty and a greater political say for ‘the people’. Britain tended to support these moves elsewhere so how could the British government continue to block these ideas in Britain?

Reason 2 – The growing respectability of urban artisans

Politicians were not so concerned with the danger of revolution breaking out as they had been earlier in the century. The old middle and landowning class belief that the ‘working classes’ could become an unthinking and violent mob was ending. The fear that exploded across Europe among the old rulers of Europe at the time of the French Revolution of 1789 was now over 70 years old. By the 1860s skilled working men in cities (called artisans) were more educated and respectable. They attended night schools, took part in local politics and were concerned with improving their living standards.

Education Acts in the early 1870s in England and Scotland meant that the working class population was becoming increasingly educated and literate. In the 1860s, when civil war raged in the USA some British textile workers even chose to accept wage cuts rather than work with cotton picked by slaves in the USA. Politicians in Britain believed the actions of the textile workers showed the working classes as thinking people having ‘a moral conscience’ who deserved the right to vote.

Reason 3 – National protest campaigns and pressure groups were sometimes effective and always gained publicity

The well-organised campaigns of the National Reform League and Reform Union are good examples of early pressure groups campaigning for political change. Other examples of pressure groups include trade unions, the early Labour Party and even the women’s campaign for the vote. They were all groups who used various methods to put pressure on the government to make changes.

Reason 4 – Fear of violence if changes did not happen

Earlier in the 19th century there was a feeling that allowing some reform would reduce pressure for greater changes. Although fears of a large scale revolution faded, demonstrations in Glasgow and riots after a large meeting in Hyde Park, London, in 1866 worried the authorities. Members of the Reform League marched to Hyde Park. They found the gates locked and some marchers tore down the railings and trampled the flower beds. The middle class had nightmares of revolution! Some reform would clam those fears.

Reason 5 – A political advantage for the party that passed reform?

This is probably the most important reason for the Second Reform Act. You will probably read in other sources that the Conservatives wanted to ‘dish the Whigs’ by ‘stealing the Liberal’s clothes’. What does this mean? Quite simply, Benjamin Disraeli, the leader of the Conservative Party in the House of Commons, believed that if his party gave the vote to working class men in the towns then these men would vote Conservative in the future. When the Liberal government collapsed over the issue of how much reform to give, Disraeli saw his chance. In 1867 the Conservative party stole many of the Liberal’s ideas (‘stole their clothes’) and spoiled their chances of winning support from working class men. An old-fashioned word for spoiling something is ‘to dish it’ and the old name for the Liberals was ‘Whig’ – so that is why ‘dish the Whigs’ is used when referring to the 1867 Reform Act.

Reason 6 – Objection to change lessened as time passed so further change became inevitable

It is often the case that after an event that has been fought over for so long eventually happens then the fears of those who were against the change simply vanish. Such was the case with the Third Reform Act. Although it was still 16 years after the previous reform, other changes in the political system such as the Secret Ballot Act and the Corrupt and Illegal Practices Act had continued the path to democracy and a fairer political system. In that situation it was almost inevitable that there were many voices declaring that the different voting rules between countryside (county) and town (borough/burghs) seemed pointless. There now seemed little difference between urban and rural workers, so the Reform Act removed the distinction.

Certainly the urban/rural balance in Britain meant that the power of the land-owning aristocracy was declining by the 1880s. City-based politicians resented the power of the old land-owning class, especially now that almost half the population was living in towns. Because voting was made secret in 1872, the city MPs hoped rural working men would vote for who they wanted – not necessarily the landowners. That would weaken the power of the old land-owning families in Parliament. Pressure for reform grew.

The same idea of inevitable change was also a reason for women finally winning equal political rights with men. The issue of votes for women had split the country before the Great War and even in 1918 there were concerns over the consequences of votes for women. However, ten years later there was hardly one voice raised against the granting of votes for women at the age of 21 on the same basis as men. The principle of votes for women had long since been accepted and no longer was a source of argument.

Reason 7 – Socialism might grow as a bigger threat if no change was allowed

In the later 19th century a new ideology was growing among the working classes. It was called socialism. At its simplest, socialists believed that working people produced the wealth of the country yet they lived in the worst conditions and were paid low wages. Socialists wanted to change the way the country was run and take wealth away from the rich and use it to make life better for the working classes. In other countries, socialists were involved in revolutions. In Britain it was argued that if large numbers of working people were denied the vote they might be attracted to revolutionary socialism. Socialism was seen as a threat by both landowners and businessmen. By allowing more working people the right to vote, it was thought they might be less likely to support revolutionary socialist ideas.

Reason 8 – The Great War as a catalyst that made change happen more quickly

This reason can only apply to the 1918 Reform Act. Nevertheless it is vital to include this in any answer to a question asking about why political change happened between 1867 and 1918.

Be careful with this section. Many of the reasons outlined here could become long and complex and take up a lot of your time. Be realistic.

Many candidates argue that women replaced men on the home front during the war, and were given the vote as a ‘thank you’ in 1919. That is far too simple and it is only part of the changes that took place in 1918. Try to expand your answer on the importance of the war and other areas.

One of the key rules about who could vote involved a residency qualification that meant you had to have lived at the same address for some time. Men who were away fighting had lost that qualification. It was politically unacceptable to tell those men when they returned from the war that they had lost their right to vote so the rules had to change.

In 1916, conscription was introduced for the first time in Britain. Men were ordered to join the armed forces or do work of national importance. Was it right that the government could order men to fight and kill on its behalf and not allow these men a chance to choose the government? That is why when the election was finally held in 1919, all men who had been in the armed forces were allowed to vote at 19 and would not have to wait until they were 21.

During the war, Lloyd-George, who was more willing to accept change, replaced Prime Minister Asquith, who was against votes for women.

By 1917 – 1918 there were plans to change the rules about voting as they applied to men, and as the rules were changing anyway it was suggested that some women could also be included. Finally, do not ignore the point about women doing men’s jobs and keeping the home front going during the war. Undoubtedly, the sight of women ‘doing their bit’ for the war effort gained them respect and balanced the negative publicity of the Suffragette campaign.

Section summary

In this issue you should have learned that:

Issue 1 will ask about why the changes happened so you must know the reasons for change.

There were both short-term and long-term reasons to explain change. Both should be dealt with in an answer.

You should be prepared to deal with the franchise reforms of 1867, 1884, 1918 and 1928.

Issue 2 – In what ways did Britain become more democratic between 1867 and 1928?

The big picture

In Britain before 1867 most men and no women had any say in choosing their government. They had no right to vote. However by 1928 almost all adults in Britain who were aged 21 or older could vote, so by 1928 Britain seemed to have become a lot more democratic.

A democracy is more than just having the right to vote. It's also about how the political system became fairer and became more representative of the British people, who in turn were better informed about the choices they had.

What follows is information you would use in an essay on the growth of democracy in Britain after 1867.

What is a democracy?

Here is an introduction to a question about how democratic Britain had become by the early 20th century. The introduction shows some of the points to consider in any democracy essay. This introduction **signposts** the main themes that will be developed later in the essay.

How far did Britain become more democratic between 1867 and 1918?

For any country to be called democratic certain conditions have to exist. First of all, adults should have the vote (1) but the right to vote did not in itself make Britain democratic. Between 1867 and 1918, other features in a democracy were created that included a fair system of voting (2), a choice of who to vote for (3) and access to information to make an informed choice (4). It should also be possible for adults to become MPs themselves (5) and parliament should be accountable to the voters (6). Between 1867 and 1918 most, but not all, of these conditions had been met fully so Britain was more of a democracy but not entirely democratic.

In the introduction you will see there are six numbered points. Each of these points in a main part of any answer about the growth of democracy in Britain. So six numbered points means there should be six main paragraphs in your answer to the question.

Another way to plan out the main paragraphs to be developed is to draw a spider diagram. In the 'body' of the spider write the main question: In what ways did Britain become more democratic between 1867 and 1918?

The following sections develop the headings in the diagrams and the points in your introduction. They provide detailed information to be added to your knowledge bank!

The right to vote

The right to vote was given to more and more people. This process was called the extension of the franchise. Without it the people of a country cannot influence political decisions.

This part of the course has a starting date of 1867. This is because a new law in that year gave the right to vote to most skilled working class men living in towns (also known as boroughs). By giving the vote to men owning property above a certain value and lodgers paying rent above £10 a year, the vote was extended to skilled working men who could afford to live in property above the required value. The effect of this reform nationally was to double the number of men who were entitled to vote.

The next extension of the franchise was in 1884 when men living in the counties (generally it is ok to refer to counties as 'the countryside') were given the vote on the same rules as men in towns

It took over 30 years more before the next franchise reform happened. In 1918 the Representation of the people Act gave the vote to another 13 million men and eight million women over 30 years of age. Not until 1928 did men and women aged 21 or over get equal political rights.

Fairness

In a democracy people should have a fair system of voting – and that meant two things had to happen if Britain was to become more democratic: voting in secret should be introduced and the distribution of MPs around the country would have to be rearranged. Corruption and threats had to be removed.

Although the 1867 Reform Act helped Britain become more democratic, voting was still open to bribery and intimidation. The Secret Ballot Act of 1872 allowed voters to vote in secret in polling booths and that certainly helped most intimidation and bribery.

The Corrupt and Illegal Practices Act of 1883 limited how much candidates could spend during election time and banned activities such as the buying of food or drink for voters. Election expenses were limited and the intention was to make elections fairer with no political party dominating a constituency because of its wealth.

Another attempt to make the political system fairer was the redistribution of seats. Britain is divided into constituencies – areas of the country that send one MP to parliament. A constituency is also called a 'seat' because it represents one seat in parliament. In the mid 19th century the population spread across Britain had changed a lot. Towns grew in size while rural areas became less well populated.

The new laws in 1867, 1885 and again in 1918 tried to make the distribution of MPs across Britain fairer by giving the right to send more MPs to Parliament in busy areas and taking the right to have an MP away from depopulated areas. This redistribution of MPs attempted to make political representation fairer, an important part of a democracy.

Choice

A country is not democratic if voters have no choice. Although many working class men had gained the right to vote in the 1880s there was no national working class party for them to vote for. However, by 1900 a new party – the Labour party – had been created to campaign for working class interests. The development of the labour party is most easily explained as a series of alliances between socialist groups and the realisation by trade unions that it would be helpful to have a political voice in parliament to look after the interests of the working classes. Not all working class men voted labour of course but the creation of the Labour Party provided choice, an essential ingredient in a democratic society. However, for people to make a real choice they must have information about their candidates.

Access to information

Literacy is important in a democracy so that people can have access to information on which to base their choice. By the late 19th century, basic literacy was quite well established in Britain. The secret ballot and the extension of the franchise had also created a voting population eager for news and information. The development and spread of railways spread information quickly to all parts of the country while local authorities were convinced that improving people's minds and health were vital to a stable prosperous nation. In every town new libraries sprung up providing not only books but also newspapers and meeting rooms for debate and political meetings. Cheap daily newspapers also spread across the nation, carried by railways, while politicians used the rail network to criss-cross the country making speeches and building support.

Accountability means that parliament reflects the wishes of the voters and is answerable to them

In 1900, the House of Lords was not elected, yet it had the power to scrap, or veto, any of the ideas of the elected MPs in the House of Commons. For Britain to be a democracy the power of the House of Lords would have to be changed. The issue came to a head when the Lords tried to block the right of the elected government to raise money through taxation. Without the money from taxes the government could not function. After a long argument and two more general elections the Parliament act of 1911 resolved the situation. The Parliament Act of 1911 was an important step on the road to a democracy in Britain. It reduced the power of the House of Lords, which now had no say over budgets and could no longer veto, or block, bills passed by the House of Commons. They could only delay them for two years.

The Parliament Act also reduced the maximum length of time between general elections from seven years to five and provided payment for Members of Parliament, thereby allowing men of the working class to consider standing for election as an MP.

The opportunity to become an MP

In a democracy, people who want to be involved in politics should be able to participate. That might mean joining a political party or standing for election as an MP. When political power was in the hands of wealth landowners the issue of payment for MPs never arose. They felt it was their duty to serve their country. They were also wealthy enough to spend time in parliament without worrying about payment. For most of the 19th century, MPs were not paid and had to own land. Although the poverty qualification to become an MP ended in the 1850s, working class men, who had to work for their living for fairly low wages, could not afford to give up their day job to become a politician. Without regular payment how could they or their families survive?

For Britain to become more democratic the chance to become an MP would have to be opened to everyone, and in 1911 the Parliament Act introduced payment for MPs, thereby allowing ordinary people greater access to the political process.

Section summary

In this section you should have learned that for a country to be democratic it is not enough just to give the vote to people. Lots of other conditions have got to be met. From 1867 onwards, the vote was given to more and more people but fairness, accountability, access to information with which to make informed choices and the right to participate directly in the political process, were all developments that carried Britain further towards democracy.

Issue 3 – Why did women in Britain gain greater political equality by 1928?

The big picture

Before 1918, women had no national political voice. They had no vote. In 1918 some women did gain the right to vote and in 1928 women gained political equality with men.

This issue looks at the reasons why women were given, or won, political equality. It also looks at the campaign for women's suffrage and asks just how effective the different protest methods were.

There are many points that have to be considered when deciding why women gained greater political equality with men.

Male attitudes

Social attitudes are very slow to change and many men still saw women as inferior. Women were often seen as irrational, emotional and not suited to politics! Politicians argued that women would simply vote as their husbands told them – or they would vote for the best looking candidate. But do not assume that all men were against votes for women. In 1867, John Stuart Mill, MP, tried to get votes for some women included in the 1867 Reform Act. His suggestion was defeated but 73 men in parliament did support him.

Changing position of women in British society

Historian Martin Pugh argues that by 1900 the view that women should have no national political voice was 'untenable', which means it was very hard to justify not giving the vote to women. By 1900, women – especially middle class women – were better educated, often attended university, and could even vote in local politics. Women were also increasingly important in trade unions. Changes in the law had also improved women's social position.

So do not fall into the trap of saying in your exam that all women were second class citizens, treated as their husband's property, and just 'given away' by one man to another on their wedding day. That attitude was more common in 1850 but was changing by 1900. Changes around the world also had an effect. Other countries such as New Zealand had given the vote to women, so why not Britain?

Female attitudes to the campaign

Not all women supported votes for women. Queen Victoria famously described the women's suffrage campaign as, 'that mad wicked folly of women's rights'. When women's suffrage groups presented petitions to parliament in support of their demands for votes for women, it was relatively easy for politicians to ignore them because of the fairly low numbers of signatures.

The importance of the different campaigning groups

The role of the NUWSS

In 1897, a number of local women's suffrage societies formed the National Union of Women's Suffrage Societies (NUWSS). The NUWSS believed in peaceful tactics to win the vote, mainly for middle class property owning women. The NUWSS was nicknamed the 'Suffragists' but be careful when writing about them. Some historians have said the government took no notice of them but recent research suggests the NUWSS was important. Membership of the NUWSS remained high (53,000) members in 1914, and when the Suffragettes became more violent, membership of the NUWSS rocketed as women left that group.

The Suffragettes

In 1903 the Women's Social and Political Union (WSPU) was formed. Their motto was 'deeds not words' and at first they grabbed the headlines through large peaceful demonstrations, but from 1910 onwards the Suffragettes became more militant, which means that they used more violent protest methods.

Beware! Do not spend a long time just describing what the Suffragettes did. Use some examples to help answer the question set.

How important were the Suffragettes?

A point often made in exam answers is that the Suffragettes kept the issue of women's suffrage in the headlines. It is true that violent Suffragette methods such as firebombs, and attacking politicians, hunger strikes and the resulting Cat and Mouse Act made big headlines. But was all the publicity useful? Did it not just make the government determined to not give in to terrorism as it would be called today?

To illustrate the debate about the importance of the Suffragettes you could use historian Martin Pugh's argument, which mainly rejects the importance of the Suffragettes. He points out that:

- Suffragette membership fell while the membership of the NUWSS increased between 1910 and 1914.
- Suffragettes destroyed sympathy for the issue of votes for women among MPs who had previously supported it.
- When the question of giving votes to women was being debated seriously in 1917 the Suffragettes had long since stopped their campaign.
- The Suffragettes were a small group whose self publicity lasted longer than their real importance.

Another point to make about the Suffragettes is that they made serious planning mistakes. Mrs Pankhurst and her Suffragettes failed to link with the Labour Party to increase democracy in Britain. They ignored the thousands of working class men who still had no voice and Mrs Pankhurst was even willing to settle for granting the vote to some wealthy women rather than campaign for the vote for all adults. Mrs Pankhurst's policy lost the Suffragettes political allies.



Emmeline Pankhurst – most people associate her with winning the right to vote for women? Others say she pushed back the chances of winning the right to vote and eventually she was an irrelevance. What do you think?

Political pressure and political advantage

If you use this as part of the Suffrage answer you must deal with it carefully. The points here should be used to explain why the government chose to avoid as far as possible the issue of votes for women before the First World War.

The Liberals had too much to do

When the Liberals came to power in 1906, women were campaigning loudly for the vote. However there were many other pressures on government time and the issue of women's suffrage was not a top priority.

Opposition from the Prime Minister

In 1908 H. H. Asquith became Prime Minister. He was against votes for women.

Ireland was a greater concern to the government than votes for women

Before 1914, all of Ireland was part of the UK but groups in Ireland wanted to break away from the UK or at least have some self-governing powers. Tensions were increasing and by 1912 there was a strong possibility that civil war could break out in Ireland. This was a serious concern to the government.

At the general election of 1910 the Liberal majority in parliament was slashed and they needed help from the Irish Nationalist MPs in Parliament. These Irish MPs told Asquith to drop the idea of votes for women and make self government for Ireland a top priority. Asquith needed Irish support so he agreed. However, Asquith had already told the Suffragettes that if he won the 1910 election he might consider women's suffrage. The Suffragettes felt they had been betrayed by the government and became more violent after 1910.

The importance of the Great War

This is another common topic that candidates write about. Once again, be careful with it. Many candidates argue that women replaced men on the home front during the war, and were given the vote as a 'thank you' in 1918. That is far too simple.

The women who worked hard and risked their lives in munitions factories were mostly single, and in their late teens or early 20s. The women who were given the vote were 'respectable' ladies, aged 30 or over who were property owners or married to property owners. So try to expand your answer on the importance of the war to other areas.

These 'other areas' can be found in the chapter dealing with Issue 1 – reasons why Britain became more democratic.

Just to remind you or direct you to the correct sections, the main points to make are:

- Residency concerns
- The consequences of conscription
- Lloyd George replaced Asquith as Prime Minister
- Reform of male voters
- Women's war work

And finally, did it really take a long time for women to win the right to vote?

Even after the reform of 1884, almost 40% of men did not have the right to vote. Politicians were unwilling to give the vote to women while so many men still had no vote.

Organised campaigns for women's suffrage began in 1866 and women were given the vote on equal terms to men in 1928 – only 60 years later and only 10 years after many men gained the vote for the first time too. So it is possible to argue that as part of historical change it was not a very long time but, to those involved, it did seem like a long time.

The vote at last

If a question in the exam asks you to go up to 1938 in your answer do not worry about not writing too much detail about the time between 1918 and 1928. The vast bulk of your essay should deal with the years up to 1918.

In 1918 the Representation of the People Act gave the vote to another 13 million men and 8 million women. Although women under 30 – and many poor women over 30 – still did not have the vote, 10 years later they did.

Extending the vote to all women on the same basis as men was suggested in 1924. It was delayed by some political opposition but in 1928 women and men were given equal rights to vote. It had ceased to be a big issue.

Section summary

In this section you should have learned:

- why there was opposition to votes for women
- why votes for women was a greater possibility by the early 1900s
- the relative importance of the Suffragettes and Suffragists
- why the Great War was an important factor in winning political equality for women.

Issue 4 - Why did the Liberal government of the early 20th century become involved in passing social reforms?

The big picture

By the end of the 19th century there was increasing evidence that poverty had causes that were often beyond the ability of individuals to help themselves. When the Liberal government came to power in 1906 they began a series of social reforms. This issue looks at the reasons why the Liberals intervened to help ease the problem of poverty.

To understand why the Liberal Reforms were so important, some background information is needed.

In the mid 19th century, most people accepted that poverty and hardship were not things the government could or should do anything about. Governments had tried to improve the worst living and working conditions with Factory and Mines Acts, and Public Health Acts were reactions to the devastating cholera outbreaks that were linked to poor sewage and the lack of fresh water in cities.

However if the government became involved in helping the poor it would cost money. That would mean taxes would have to go up. The middle classes would have to pay more tax yet the money would not be spent on them. Why should they help people who, it was believed, were too lazy to help themselves?

In his book *Self Help* Samuel Smiles wrote, 'Self help is the root of all genuine growth,' and Norman Pearson, another 19th century voice on the topic of poverty believed, that the poor were, 'made of inferior material...and cannot be improved'.

The point is that most of the middle classes and the government believed that little or nothing could be done to ease the problem of poverty so why did the Liberals launch such a wide-ranging series of social reforms when they came to power in 1906? There must have been very persuasive reasons and those reasons form the core of this issue, investigating why the Liberal government of the early 20th century became involved in passing social reforms.

You will not be expected to decide on any one reason to explain the reforms. Instead you should be able to identify the most important reasons and explain them.

There is no one single reason to explain the Liberal reforms. In any answer you will be expected to consider all of the reasons. The following explanation of the various pressures on the government and reasons for change is not meant to suggest that one was more important than the other. They all influenced the Liberal government in some way.

Pressure on the government from reports on poverty

One of the most famous investigations into poverty was by Charles Booth. He carried out extensive research in London and presented his findings as hard, statistical facts, not opinions. He showed that poverty had causes, often beyond the control of the poor themselves. What could any individual do about low pay, unemployment, sickness and old age?

Another investigation into poverty in York was carried out by Seebohm Rowntree and was even more shocking. The Rowntree report showed that 30% of the York population lived in extreme poverty. People realised that if York, a relatively small English city, hid such problems then so would other British cities. The problem of poverty was therefore a national problem.

Worries about national security

When the Boer War started in 1899 volunteers rushed to join up – but almost 25% of them were rejected on the grounds that they were not fit enough. If men of military age were so unfit for service, the government worried about Britain's future ability to defend itself against a stronger enemy. The 1906 Report of the Inter-Departmental Committee on Medical Inspection and Feeding of Children attending Public Elementary Schools stated that there were very serious problems with children's health yet very little was being done about it.

Worries about national efficiency

By the end of the 19th century, Britain was no longer the strongest industrial nation and was facing serious competition from new industrial nations such as Germany. It was believed that if the health and educational standards of Britain's workers got worse, then the country's position as a strong industrial power would be threatened. In Germany a system of welfare benefits and old-age pensions had already been set up in the 1880s. If a main competitor could afford to do it why could Britain not do likewise?

The government felt that reforms might give them a political advantage

Many historians believe that the Liberal Reforms were passed for politically selfish reasons. Since 1884, most working class men had the vote and the Liberals wanted to attract those voters. But by 1906 a new party – the Labour Party – was competing for the same votes. If the Liberals were seen as unsympathetic to the poor, what might happen at elections in the future?

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 in people's everyday lives.

The influence of New Liberal ideas

It would be far too harsh to argue that the Liberals passed social reforms just to win votes. A new generation of Liberal politicians genuinely believed that the government had a responsibility to help the poor.

The 'old Liberal' Prime Minister, Campbell Bannerman, died and was replaced by a younger man, Asquith, in 1908. New Liberals with new 'interventionist' ideas such as David Lloyd George were given important government jobs. The arrival into government of younger politicians with New Liberal ideas is the main reason why so many reforms happened from 1908 onwards.

The example of Municipal Socialism

Some Liberal-controlled local town councils became involved in improving the welfare of the people in their town. Local authorities that did try to tackle issues linked to poverty were used as a model to persuade national government that political intervention was both possible and desirable on a national scale.

Birmingham had become an example of a local authority taking control of social services and utilities such as the water and gas supplies. In Glasgow, the town council also took control of the city water supply and provided street lighting along with many other municipal services. These services were paid for by local taxation. As the local taxes tended to be paid by the wealthy and were used to help the poor, the phrase ‘municipal socialism’ was used to mean local authorities spending money raised by local taxation for the public’s benefit.

Increasingly, social reformers saw that the answer to poverty lay with the willingness of national government to tackle the national problem.

Section summary

In this section you should have learned the following:

- By the end of the 19th century there was increasing evidence that poverty had causes that were often beyond the ability of individuals to help themselves.
- There were various reasons why the Liberal government that came to power in 190 started a programme of social reform. These include concern for the poor exposed in reports on poverty.
- There were worries about national efficiency and security.
- Political self-interest drove change.
- There was a growing political belief that governments should get more involved in social issues – if local government could do it why not national government?

Issue 5 – How effectively did the Liberal reforms deal with the problem of poverty in early 20th century Britain?

The big picture

The Liberal Reforms of 1906–14 are very important because they marked the acceptance of the idea that the national government should have a large role in helping those who could not help themselves. Between 1906 and 1914 the Liberal Reforms tried to deal with the problem of poverty and focused on four groups: the old, the young, the sick and the unemployed.

To answer a question dealing with this issue you will need to be able to do several things:

- You should know accurate and detailed information about what the Liberal Reforms were.
- Be able to explain what is meant by the problem of poverty. That means the problems which caused poverty, for example unemployment or old age, and also the problems caused by poverty such as bad health.
- Link the problems of poverty to the reforms passed by the Liberals and decide whether or not the reforms helped solve the problems. In other words, decide how effectively the Liberal Reforms dealt with the problem of poverty in early 20th century Britain.

The Liberal Reforms 1906–14

There is no way to avoid learning what the Liberal reforms were. Start by organising the social reforms under four main categories – the old, the young, the sick, the unemployed.

The old

What was done?

In 1908, the government started paying five shillings (25 pence) a week to people over 70. A married couple got 37.5 pence.

How effective was the reform?

Remember that Rowntree had set the poverty line for a single person at 35 pence, so the pensions would help the elderly poor but they were not the answer to old age poverty. In poorer areas of the cities, life expectancy was around 45 years so pensions at the age of 70 would help only very few of the poor who lived long enough to collect the pension. Most of the very poor died long before their 70th birthday. There were also some qualification rules that excluded some of the elderly. The pensions were a help, but certainly not a solution to old age poverty.

The young

What was done?

In 1906 free school meals were started for the poorest children. In 1907 school medical inspections started but it was not until 1912 that free medical treatment was available.

Social reformers blamed poverty for causing a lot of youth crime, so in 1908 juvenile courts and borstals – young people's prisons – were opened. It was believed that if young law breakers were sent to adult prison they would learn how to be better criminals.

All these reforms, including restricting the sale of cigarettes and alcohol to children, were called a 'Children's Charter' because it was believed this set of reforms would be like an old-fashioned document or charter that would guarantee better lives of children.

How effective were the reforms?

Researchers found that during school holidays the growth of poor children slowed and body-weight often declined. This suggests that school meals were an important part of the health of poor children.

Medical inspections did little to solve any problems so it was not until free medical treatment for school children was started that problems could be dealt with.

Early attempts to protect children from 'social evils' such as smoking and alcohol by setting minimum ages at which these things could be bought had limited success.

The sick

What was done?

There was no free National Health Service at that time. The poor could not usually afford medical help. The National Insurance Scheme of 1911 gave some medical benefits. The scheme was called a contributory system because each worker paid four pence a week towards the help they received. The employer paid three pence a week and the government paid two pence a week. That meant each insured worker got nine pence in benefits from an outlay of four pence. The plan was soon called 'ninepence for fourpence'. Everyone on low wages – up to £160 a year – was insured. An insured worker got ten shillings a week (50 pence) when off sick but the benefits only lasted for 26 weeks.

How effective were the reforms?

Illness and absence from work was the major cause of poverty, therefore any money coming in as 'sick pay insurance benefit' would help a family during hard times but only the insured worker got free medical treatment from a doctor. Other family members did not benefit from the scheme, no matter how sick they were.

The unemployed

William Beveridge, an advisor to Lloyd George said, 'The problem of unemployment lies at the root of most other social problems'.

What was done?

Labour exchanges were started that were similar to current-day job centres. Workers could find out easily what jobs were available in their area. You have already read about the National Insurance Act of 1911 earlier in this unit but the new law also dealt with unemployment. Like the health insurance reform, it was a combination of state help along with contributions from the worker.

Most insured workers got seven shillings (35 pence) a week for a maximum of 15 weeks. Beware: the National Insurance scheme of 1911 applied both to health and unemployment. Although the part of the act that dealt with unemployment still involved contributions paid by workers, employers and the government it is not the famous 'ninepence for fourpence'.

How effective were the reforms?

The Act of 1911 was only meant to cover temporary unemployment and only applied to seven trades, most of which suffered seasonal unemployment. When long-term unemployment increased after the Great War the system started to fall apart, as the payments of those in work did not provide enough income for the government to pay out money to the unemployed.

Other reforms

In any question about the Liberal Reforms, look very closely at what specific area is being asked about. If the question asks about the Liberal Reforms in general you should remember that there were other reforms passed apart from the main ones mentioned here. These include:

- In 1908, miners secured an 8-hour day, the first time the length of the working day was fixed for adult men.
- In 1909, the Trade Boards Act tried to protect workers in 'sweat shops', such as tailoring and lace making by setting up trade boards to fix minimum wages and maximum hours.
- In 1911, the Shops Act gave shop assistants a weekly half day off.

How effective were the Liberal reforms?

In any answer to this you should think about what the reforms were meant to do. They were not meant to create a Welfare State. They were meant to provide some help to people who could be thought of as the deserving poor. Most of the reforms also depended on those who received help doing something to help themselves. The National Insurance Act is a good example of this idea. The government was prepared to intervene to help the poor, but as part of the deal the poor also had to help themselves by paying contributions towards their benefits.

Winston Churchill, then a Liberal MP, neatly summed-up the aim of the Liberal Reforms. He said, ‘if we see a drowning man we do not drag him to the shore. Instead we provide help to allow him to swim ashore.’ In other words, the Liberals tried to help some of the poorer sections of society to help themselves.

Section summary

In this section you should have learned:

- What the Liberal Reforms did to help the old, young, sick and unemployed.
- How effective the Liberal Reforms were in dealing with the social problems facing Britain in the early 20th century.

Issue 6 – How successful was the Labour Government of 1945–51 in dealing with the social problems facing Britain after World War Two?

The big picture

In 1942 the Beveridge Report identified five key social problems that faced Britain. They were called the 'Five Giants'. In 1945 a new Labour government introduced a series of reforms that aimed to deal with each of the five giant problems identified by Beveridge. This issue looks at what Labour did and how successful they were at dealing with the 'Five Giants'.

World War Two had a big effect on the public's attitude towards the role of the government in their lives.

The phrase, 'Post-war must be better than pre-war' sums up public attitudes during the war. It means that people wanted a better Britain after the war and even a Ministry of Health statement said that there could be 'no return to the pre-war position'.

Most historians accept that it was the effect of war that prepared the way for a peace time welfare state. The government organised the rationing of food, clothing and fuel and gave extra milk and means for expectant mothers and children. Evacuation of poor children from inner city areas to the suburbs alerted the middle classes of Britain to the real poverty that still existed in the industrial slums. Bombing of cities created vast areas that had to be rebuilt. Free hospital treatment for war-wounded – including bomb injuries for civilians, and free immunisation – are examples of the move towards a 'free health service. To pay for these services the public got used to very high taxation levels.

By the end of the war both main political parties – Conservative and Labour – promised social reforms to improve health, housing and education.

The Beveridge Report

An easy way to learn what Labour did is to know a bit about the Beveridge Report. The effect of the Beveridge Report was huge. Remember the report was published in 1942, three years before Labour came to power. Labour's reforms were based on the report so Labour could hardly claim to have created the ideas! Beveridge identified five main causes of hardship and poverty. He called them the 'Five Giants' blacking the path to progress. These giants were:

- Want (poverty)
- Disease (bad health)
- Squalor (bad housing)
- Ignorance (poor education)
- Idleness (unemployment)



This cartoon appeared in 1942. Ten years later, would the soldier feel that Labour's social reforms justified his optimism?

The giant of want

The social problem that affected all others was poverty (called 'want' by Beveridge).

The solution?

The Family Allowance Act (started by the wartime government) paid a small amount of money to all mothers of two or more children.

The Industrial Injuries Act paid compensation for all injuries caused at work. It was paid by the government, not individual employers. All workers were covered.

The National Insurance Act of 1946 improved the old Liberal Act and allowed for sickness and unemployment benefits, retirement, widow's pensions and maternity grants. All people in work were included in this insurance. But what about those not in work?

The National Assistance Act helped people who were not in work or the old who had not paid enough contributions into the new National Insurance scheme. It was a safety net to ensure that nobody had to fall into poverty.

Was the solution successful?

By including all workers and families in the benefits scheme, it seemed this attack on poverty caused by shortage of money would be very helpful.

The giant of disease

Ill health was both a cause and result of poverty – but the poor could not afford medical treatment.

The solution?

The most important of Labour's Welfare creations after 1945 was the National Health Service (NHS). The NHS was based on three aims:

- *Universal access*: the NHS was for everybody. The old health system, based on insurance schemes did not cover everyone.
- *Comprehensive*: the NHS would treat all medical problems.
- *Free at point of use*: no patient would be asked to pay for any treatment. In reality the service was, and is, paid for by the National Insurance payments made by every worker.

Was the solution successful?

The government inherited many out-of-date hospitals, costs were high and to keep doctors happy the NHS operated alongside private medicine. By 1950 the idea of 'free for all' treatment was damaged when charges were introduced for spectacles and dental treatment, but overall the NHS was welcomed and did provide medical help from 'the cradle to the grave'.

The giant of squalor

'Squalor' means bad housing and overcrowding. Most of Britain's cities still had slum areas, and overcrowding was still a serious problem made worse by bomb damage during the war.

The solution?

A fast house-building programme. The government aimed to build 200,000 houses each year. Most were council houses for rent. Many were factory-made houses, called 'pre-fabs' for short, which were quickly assembled on site. The New Towns Act in 1946 laid the plans for 14 New Towns to be built, including Glenrothes and East Kilbride. These were to be 'people-friendly' towns to relieve the housing problems in older cities.

Was the solution successful?

Many houses were built but Labour did not build as many houses as it promised. By 1951 there was still overcrowding and long waiting lists for council housing.

Some new industries moved to the New Towns but often the towns became places where workers lived but they still commuted into the older towns for work.

The giant of ignorance

Many children received no education past primary stage and poorer parents could not afford the fees that some secondary schools charged.

The solution?

Labour put the Education Act of 1944 into operation, although the Act was the work of the wartime coalition government. The Education Act of 1944 raised the school leaving age to 15. All children were to get free secondary education. An exam at 11 (called the 11+ exam or the 'qualy' in Scotland, which was short for the qualification exam) placed children in certain types of school. Those who passed the exam went to senior secondary schools, they were expected to stay on at school after 15 and go on to university. Children who failed the exam went to junior secondary and were not expected to stay at school after 15. These children were expected to get unskilled jobs.

Was the solution successful?

For those who passed the 11+ exam or 'qualy' the system worked well. However those children who failed the exam seemed to be stuck in a trap of low expectations and inferior education. Many people opposed the idea of deciding a child's future at 11 or 12 years old.

The giant of idleness

In 1944 the government agreed to aim for 'full employment'.

The solution?

After the war there seemed to be work for everyone as Britain rebuilt itself. But Labour also nationalised certain industries, which means that the government took over the running of them. Be careful in discussing nationalisation in your exam. Some markers might think it is irrelevant because it was not a social reform, so it is up to you to make it relevant. Nationalisation was one way of keeping full employment as the government could use tax money to keep an industry going even if it was facing economic difficulties.

Was the solution successful?

Nationalisation was costly and at times led to bad management but in this part of the course it is not relevant to go into the economic arguments about nationalisation.

Section summary

In this section you should have learned:

- why the Beveridge Report is so important
- what is meant by a Welfare State
- what the Labour Government's social reforms were between 1945 and 1951
- the different points of view about Labour's part in the creation of the Welfare State
- how effective were the Labour Government's social reforms 1945–51 in dealing with problems facing Britain.