

## The Liberal Reforms 1906-1911

### **1906 Free School Meals Act**

- Not all local authorities took part in the act – it was a permissive act
- Over 180,000 'needy' children provided with free school meals to help them concentration levels and to help them learn more effectively
- 1914 - Over 14 million free school meals were being provided despite only ½ of the local authorities providing the meals

### **1907 School Medical Inspections Act**

- Set up the School Medical Service
- Established the medical department in the Board of Education
- Made health checks compulsory for children at school
- 1914 – Three out of four LEAs were providing the checks and two out of three were given treatment
- Not everyone was given treatment & many were unable to afford treatment

### **1908 Children's Act (or Charter)**

- Made parental neglect illegal, by making them responsible for the child's welfare
- Set up borstals and juvenile courts for young offenders
- Made it illegal for children to be sold alcohol or tobacco
- Most of the legislation was already in place - the bulk of it was simply re-written
- Did ensure at least a minimum standard for children's care
- Allowed adults and children to be treated differently

### **1908 Old Age Pensions Act**

- Provided a pension of 5 shillings a week for singles and 7s and 6d a week for married couples
  - Full payment was approximately £21-£31 a week
- Paid out of general taxation, not by recipient contributions
- Provided a regular income for those who qualified – examples of conditions were being over 70 and 'of good character'
- Approximately 1 million qualifying by 1915
  - More women qualified than men

### **1909 Trade Boards Act**

- Boards were set up to improve the working lives of employers and employees by introducing fixed minimum wages and setting minimum working conditions
- Initially covered 200,000 mostly women workers in trades such as tailoring and lace-making where there were long hours, low wages and no trade unions
- By 1913, this was extended to 6 trades and included coal miners
- The reform was continued in a second act where further trade boards were set up

### **1909 Labour Exchanges Act**

- Set up places where workers could look for a job and meet employers and vice versa
- By 1914, over 2 million workers had registered and 430 exchanges were finding over 3,000 jobs a day
  - It was estimated that for every worker who found a job, 3 didn't
  - Also didn't cure the unemployment problem and merely made the market easier to operate

### **1911 National Insurance (Unemployment) Act**

- Workers and employers in certain trades gave a weekly contribution to a national insurance fund which was topped-up by taxation
- Enabled workers to receive a weekly benefit if they became unemployed
- It covered 2.25 million workers and gave a weekly benefit of 7 shillings a week for 15 weeks giving families a regular income to avoid destitution
- Only applied to 'insured trades' where there was regular or seasonal unemployment i.e. shipbuilding
- Most workers were also not covered and had to rely on their own savings

### **1911 National Insurance (Sickness) Act**

- Workers and employers gave a weekly contribution to a national fund which was topped-up by taxation
- Covered 13 million people
- Paid out a weekly benefit of 10 shillings a week for 13 weeks followed by 5 shillings a week for a further 13 weeks
  - No more benefit could be claimed after the 26 week/6 month period
- Also available: maternity grants, a disability benefit and free medical treatment with an approved doctor available.
- Only covered workers earning below £160 pa and only covered people aged 16-60, leaving a gap of 10 years before the old age pension could be claimed
- It also only covered the contributor and not the whole family

### **1911 Shops Act**

- Provided a weekly half-day holiday for workers and introduced a maximum working week, limited to 60 hours
- Washing facilities in shops were also introduced
- However, employers could make up the 'lost time' with longer hours on other days

### **1908 & 1911 Coal Mines Acts**

- Fixed the length of a working day underground to 8 hours
- Improved safety regulations but still a dangerous occupation with long hours and low pay
- Also didn't take into account the time it would take to get to the mines