**Model Liberal Reasons Essay**

**How far were the reports on poverty produced by Booth and Rowntree responsible for the Liberal Social reforms of 1906 - 1914?**

In 1906 the Liberals won a massive majority in the General Election. Although their manifesto had not been built on social reform, the next eight years were to bring forward a raft of social reform unparalleled up to that date. **(Context)** This was due to many different reasons. The Laissez Faire system was not working but the government claimed that there was no evidence to justify spending money on the poor. This evidence was produced by the surveys of Booth and Rowntree in a format that could not be discredited. This led to a fear that if the Liberals did not bring in some social reform, working class men might transfer their votes to the new Labour Party. However Liberal philosophy was changing anyway.

All these arguments were concerned with problems within Britain but there were also worries about Britain’s position as a world power.

There was an idea at the time of Social Darwinism which suggested that countries would flourish or wither based on the quality of the people. This would show itself in our ability to protect the Empire in times of war and compete industrially in times of peace. These two ideas came together in a fear of the new vibrant Germany across the North Sea.

The Laissez Faire system was not working and needed reviewed. This system suggested that the government was responsible for protecting the country and providing a level playing field for its people to compete. Beyond this it should involve itself as little as possible in the lives of its citizens. If you could not compete to provide a decent lifestyle then it was due to your moral failing and nothing to do with the government. The only help available was from the Poor Law, which was hated and charities which were swamped by the scale of the problem. However the government were claiming that the only evidence provided about the problem was anecdotal, exaggerated the problem and was inaccurate.

This evidence was to be provided in a style that the government could not discredit by the surveys of Booth and Rowntree. **(Link)** Charles Booth was worried that if there was as much as 25% poverty in London, that it might spark a socialist revolution. He conducted a statistical survey which split people into classes based on their pay and found to his horror that the figure was worse than he had thought, with 30.7% of the London population living in poverty. **(Knowledge to back up the argument)** As this was based on figures rather than stories the government could not discredit it but still claimed that they could not pass a law just for London. **(Analysis of the importance of the factor)**

Seebohm Rowntree carried out a similar study in York and found that the figure there was similar at 28%. As he himself said “We have been accustomed to look on poverty in London as exceptional. We are faced by the startling probability that 25 to 30% of the town populations of the United Kingdom are living in poverty” which suggested that it was a national problem. **(Analysis of the importance of the factor)** He also defined the poverty line at “21s 8d, the minimum necessary for food, rent, clothing, light, fuel etc - just enough for the maintenance of merely physical efficiency.” Finally he found that people fell into poverty at the same stages of their lives which suggested that it could not just be moral failings to blame. **(Knowledge to back up the argument)** These arguments of Booth and Rowntree were widely read and exploded the myth that poverty was not widespread and could be blamed on moral failings by their statistical nature and would have concentrated the minds of the government on a problem they could no longer ignore. **(Evaluation of the importance of the factor)** This led to a fear that if the Liberals did not do something for the working class, they might vote for the new Labour Party. **(Link)**

Up till this time the only two parties were the Liberals and Conservatives, both middle to upper class parties. The Labour Party was the new party of the working class and was keen to redistribute wealth to eradicate the obscene wealth and obscene poverty which existed in Britain. Thus they were competing with the Liberals in the towns for the same votes. If the Liberals did nothing for the working class they were likely to lose these votes to Labour. **(Analysis of the importance of the factor)** This was already becoming apparent as the Labour seats rose from 2 in 1900, to 29 in 1906 and 42 by 1910. **(Knowledge to back up the argument)**

There was also a fear of socialism out with Parliament. There had been a series of industrial disputes which the government saw as political and mindful of the attempted revolution in Russia in 1905, the government felt they needed to placate the working class to stop a similar event in Britain. The thought of losing power to Labour was something that was bound to worry the Liberals and would have influenced their thinking on social reform. **(Evaluation of the importance of the factor)**

However the Liberal philosophy was changing anyway. **(Link)** Liberalism was the party of the individual. It believed that it was up to the individual to make their own life choices. But if a person was working as hard as they could and was still unable to earn enough to make such choices, could that policy be Liberal? Consequently new Liberals believed that there were occasions when it was right to help the deserving poor to get out of poverty. **(Analysis of the importance of the factor).** As Liberals had been charge of town councils such as Birmingham with Joseph Chamberlain, then a Liberal, they had seen poverty close up and were dealing with it in a collectivist manner. This gave a template for national action. Although the new liberals were a small group, they included some of the brightest lights in the Liberal Party and undoubtedly had some effect on the thinking of the government, especially after 1908. **(Evaluation of the importance of the factor)**

It was not just worries about what was happening in the country that affected Liberal thinking about social reform but worries about Britain’s position as a world power. **(Link)**

There was a belief at that time in Social Darwinism. This was a perversion of Darwin’s theory which suggested that societies would thrive or fail based on the quality of its people.

Britain had got into the Boer War in 1899 and since they were fighting farmers with no regular army it was thought that this would be a short, triumphant war. Britain did eventually win with 400,000 troops against 30,000 untrained Boers after 3 years. This was tremendous shock to the British public and when it was realised that 50% of the urban volunteers were unfit for service, fears of Social Darwinism arose. **(Analysis of the importance of the factor)** In Manchester 11,000 men volunteered but 8,000 were rejected giving a stark example of the level of fitness of the working class. These men could not be classed as moral failures as they were willing to risk their lives for their country but they were physically unable to carry a rifle or march to the battlefield. **(Knowledge to back up the argument)** The worry was that should Britain become involved in a war with a stronger enemy, would we win? The Boer War provided a shock for the British people and caused them to look back on the industrial performance over the previous 30 years. **(Evaluation of the importance of the factor and Link)**

When Britain’s industrial performance was analysed it was realised that there had been a slippage from being clearly top trading and producing nation to just being in the top group. Trade figures between Britain and Germany back this up. In 1880 Britain had 22.9% of world trade while Germany had 8.5%. By 1910 this had changed to Britain with 13.6% with Germany overtaking Britain to 14.8%. A classic case of Social Darwinism in action. **(Analysis of the importance of the factor)** The shock of the Boer War and the realisation that we had been overtaken by Germany must have concentrated the minds of the government to realise that it was time that the quality of our workers and soldiers had to be improved. **(Evaluation of the importance of the factor and Link)** As the war Hero Robert Baden Powell stated “Recent reports on the deterioration of our race ought to act as a warning to be taken in time before it goes too far.” **(Knowledge to back up the argument)**

These two ideas came together in a fear of the new vibrant Germany. They had a larger army than Britain, was building a navy and wanted an Empire. The alliance system that would start the First World War was in place by 1907 so it looked like we might have to fight Germany. We had always believed that if money was pushed at the poor, it was wasted but Germany had introduced Sickness Insurance, Accident Insurance and Old Age Pensions between 1883 and 1889 and it seemed to be making them more efficient. If Britain did not make an effort to match Germany any potential war might be a disaster. **(Analysis of the importance of the factor).** It is clear that this fear did influence the British government because as soon as he became chancellor of the exchequer, Lloyd George went to Germany to study their National Insurance system. **(Knowledge to back up the argument and Evaluation of the importance of the factor)**

In conclusion, the evidence from the surveys of Booth and Rowntree were undoubtedly important in proving to the government that the Laissez Faire system was not working and linked in with their fears that they would lose votes to Labour if they did nothing to help the working class. It is true that their philosophy was changing but possibly this did not affect the majority of Liberal M.Ps.

However, this essay believes that the sharp shock of the near defeat in the Boer War and the realisation that our industrial performance had been slipping for fears crystallised into a fear that a possible war with the more powerful Germany could lead to disaster if efforts were not made to improve the stock of the nation were the main reasons behind the Liberal Reforms of 1906 to 1914. **( Summing up the argument and making a final decision)**

**Marks Awarded**

**Introduction Context (1) 1**

**Line of argument (1) 1**

**Main Body Knowledge (6) 6**

**Analysis (6) 6**

**Evaluation (4) 4**

**Conclusion Recapitulate Argument (1) 1**

**Final Judgement (1) 1**