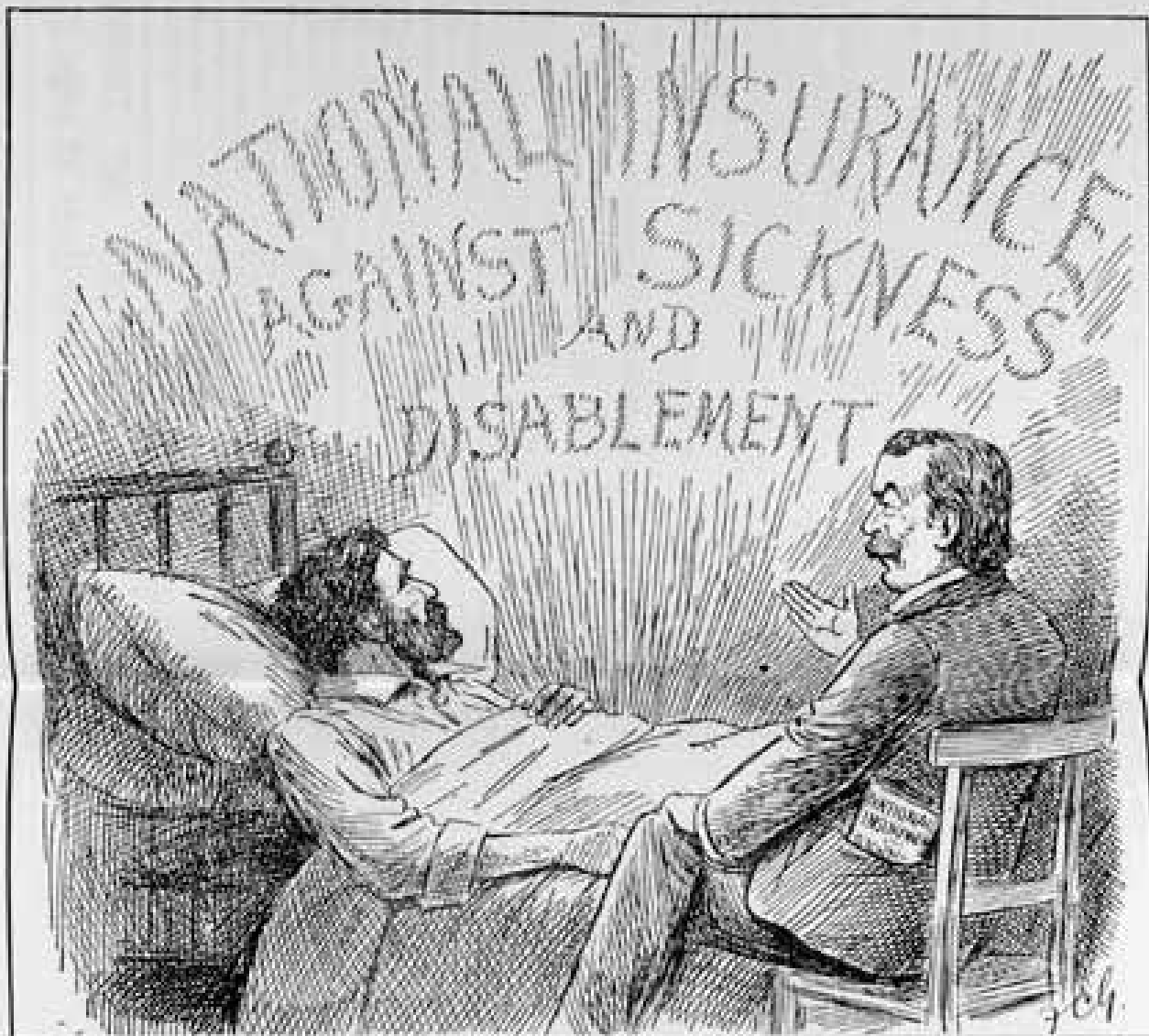


## Social policy

Susanne Stoddart analyses how the Liberal government's introduction of labour exchanges and maternity benefits was represented in the press, in terms particularly of gender status, gender roles and domestic identities

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# Domesticity and the New Liberalism in the Edwardian Liberal Press

**B**ETWEEN 1906 AND the outbreak of the First World War, the Liberal Party in power paved the way for the development of a more socially active state. Influenced by social investigators such as Charles Booth, who found that 30 per cent of those surveyed in London were living in poverty,<sup>1</sup> the radical Liberals introduced a range of reform measures aimed at improving the lives of workers, their dependents and the elderly. Increasingly termed 'new Liberals' by contemporaries, they laid the foundations of the welfare state through initiatives such as the Old Age Pensions Act 1908 and the National Insurance Act 1911. These social reforms represented a watershed in the political history of modern Britain. Household economies became the important business of leading politicians to an extent that was never before conceived of.<sup>2</sup> Indeed, in celebration of welfare reform, the *Liberal Monthly* boldly asserted in January 1912 that, 'we say Liberalism has gone to the cottage door; nay! It has done more than that. It has lifted the latch and entered'.<sup>3</sup>

Considering the importance that had long been placed upon the masculine status of the self-reliant and independent husband, father and head of household (not least in terms of validating a man's claim to a vote),<sup>4</sup> the above statement might be interpreted as a brave comment to be conveyed from the pages of *Liberal Monthly*: a popular journal designed to convert working men to the Liberal cause. As John Tosh notes, independence was the 'key nineteenth-century indicator of masculinity achieved ... combining as it did dignified work, sole maintenance of the family, and free association on terms of equality with other men'.<sup>5</sup> Jon Lawrence shows that Edwardian Conservative propaganda often sought to raise fears about

the negative impact that the new Liberal shift towards welfare reform had upon the Victorian ideal of manly independence and domestic patriarchy. Propaganda stressed the working man's right to status as head of his household, protected from the unwanted intrusions of an increasingly collectivist and interventionist state.<sup>6</sup> The Conservative *Spectator* warned in November 1912 that, 'Englishmen to-day are in serious danger of selling their individual liberty – the birthright of every Briton – for a mess of Radical legislation ... Is it really becoming a matter of indifference whether an Englishman's house is to remain his castle or not?'.<sup>7</sup>

Prominent new Liberal theorists, including sociologist L. T. Hobhouse and politician Herbert Samuel, did seek to reconcile the shift towards collectivism with the individualism characteristic of the classical Liberalism. They distinguished their collectivism from socialism by propounding the organic view of society. The organic view emphasised that the progress of individuals was only truly possible if it did not conflict with the wider harmony and welfare of society.<sup>8</sup> However, despite these efforts at outlining a consistent ideology of the new Liberalism, concerns and confusion about the practical boundaries of the redefined relationship between the state and the individual were not only raised in Conservative propaganda. An individual writing under the pen name of 'A Radical of '85' explained in 1908 that the Liberals were, 'in danger of being left without a catch word (or catch phrase) which would express their attitude towards the [social] problem of the hour'. They elaborated, 'politicians of weight, who in the Commons support the collectivist schemes of the Liberal Cabinet, if they are addressing meetings in the country, leave it

Liberal Party poster advertising the 1911 National Insurance Act

to be inferred that they endorse the individualistic and self-assertive notions which were the stock-in-trade of official Liberalism twenty years ago'.<sup>9</sup> Physician and social reformer Havelock Ellis reflected in 1912 that, 'every scheme of social reform ... raises anew a problem that is never out of date': 'the controversy between Individualism and Socialism'.<sup>10</sup>

Championed by the often impulsive and emotional David Lloyd George – renowned for his passionate platform performances – it is perhaps not surprising that Edwardian progressivism could appear haphazard and lacking consistency of thought within the context of the new relationships that were being negotiated between the state and the individual. As Martin Pugh argues, Lloyd George 'showed no *intellectual* interest in economic ideas or in Liberalism ... It was his unsystematic habit of jumping from one subject to another that first led his officials to dub him "The Goat"'.<sup>11</sup> A. G. Gardiner, editor of the Edwardian Liberal *Daily News*, commented in his lively 1908 pen-portrait of Lloyd George that, 'he is the improviser of politics. He spins his web as he goes along. He thinks best on his feet ... He is no Socialist, for, as I have said, he has no theories, and Socialism is all theory'.<sup>12</sup>

A. G. Gardiner was writing here not as a detached political commentator, but rather as one of a number of Edwardian Liberal newspaper editors who held a close personal relationship with Lloyd George. Indeed, Lloyd George relied heavily upon a network of Liberal writers for their outspoken support for social reform. His close confidants included Gardiner, the *Daily Chronicle's* Robert Donald and C. P. Scott of the *Manchester Guardian*.<sup>13</sup> In 1913 Lloyd George gratefully acknowledged the 'warm and loyal friendship' that Gardiner provided, and was confident in 1911 that he could 'always rely on the powerful influence of the *Daily News*'.<sup>14</sup> Correspondences such as these lend much support to Ian Packer's view that, in effect, the Edwardian Liberal press acted as 'an extension of the party'.<sup>15</sup> The closeness of the Liberal Party and press, in addition to the mass-circulation newspaper industry that was developing in Britain by the turn of the twentieth century, means that the newspapers provide an invaluable source for helping to unpick the subtle and complex relationships between the state and the individual that were not programmatically outlined, but were nevertheless being tested, renegotiated and communicated when new Liberal welfare measures were introduced.

This article uses the Edwardian Liberal press to explore the representation of two key new Liberal reforms aimed at alleviating the social struggle endured by adult men and woman. Although some references are made to Conservative titles, most of the evidence for this article is drawn from four of the key Edwardian Liberal national daily newspapers – the morning *Daily News* and *Daily Chronicle* and the evening *Westminster Gazette*

and *The Star* – in addition to a hugely influential provincial daily, the *Manchester Guardian*. The first Liberal reform to be considered in this article is the opening of a national network of labour exchanges in February 1910. Secondly, the first allocations of national insurance maternity benefits in January 1913 will be explored. The article questions how the newspapers sought to reduce any sense of shame, or loss of status, for men through their interactions with state social reform measures, or through their wives' receipt of welfare provisions. By considering press representations of these relationships between the state and the individual, the article explores how the new Liberalism as a popular political discourse was portrayed in Edwardian culture and how it was influenced by ideas about gender status, gender roles and domestic identities.

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### Labour exchanges

1908 saw a severe downturn in trade and employment. Unemployment figures were at their highest since the depression of the mid-1880s, standing at 9.5 per cent by October 1908. The Conservatives promoted their slogan of 'tariff reform means work for all' as the cure for these embarrassing statistics.<sup>16</sup> However, on the recommendation of the Royal Commission on the Poor Law, which convened between 1905 and 1909, the Liberals responded with the Labour Exchanges Act 1909, organised by Winston Churchill as the president of the Board of Trade. The commission urged the formation of 'a labour exchange, established and maintained by the Board of Trade, to provide efficient machinery for putting those requiring work and those requiring workers into prompt communication'.<sup>17</sup> Both the Majority and Minority Poor Law Commissioners' reports acknowledged that employers and workers did not have a satisfactory means of distributing and finding information about available jobs.<sup>18</sup>

The Employment Exchanges Committee of the Central (Unemployed) Body of London had already established some labour exchanges in London, following the passing of the Conservative 1905 Unemployed Workmen Act. However, the Poor Law reports singled out the exchanges' common association with relief and charity as one of the major factors accounting for their overall failure to attract those seeking work. The commissioners reported that there was a tendency to confuse the exchanges with Distress Committees, repelling those who objected to 'a system of "State-created work"'.<sup>19</sup> Therefore, a key aim of the Board of Trade was to improve the perception of, and remove prejudices surrounding, the new national network of labour exchanges, providing them with a more positive, rather than shaming, image for respectable workers.<sup>20</sup>

Indeed, introducing the Labour Exchanges Bill into the House of Commons in 1909, Churchill explained that:



Those who know the sort of humiliation to which the genuine working man is subject, by being very often indistinguishable from one of the class of mere loafers and vagrants, will recognise as of great importance the steps which can sharply and irretrievably divide the two classes in our society'.<sup>21</sup>

Illuminating this division was a vital aim of the national network of labour exchanges not only to reduce any sense of shame surrounding interactions with the exchanges but also because they were designed as the necessary preliminary step before unemployment insurance legislation was introduced (into some trades in 1912). Labour exchanges provided the mechanism for testing willingness to work, thereby distinguishing between applications for assistance put forward by the deserving, able-bodied unemployed and the undeserving loafer. If an individual was registered at a labour exchange and the exchange could not find them a job then they were to be considered unemployed against their will and entitled to unemployment benefit.<sup>22</sup>

When the new labour exchanges opened across Britain in February 1910, newspaper journalists were present as crowds of unemployed people queued to register. In a similar fashion to the introduction of state pensions in 1909, the scenes at the new labour exchanges were portrayed by the Liberal press as 'a great national event' and achievement. Indeed, the setting caused the Liberal halfpenny *Daily Chronicle* to draw immediate comparisons between the 'new industrial era' marked by the opening of the exchanges and 'the

#### One of the earliest labour exchanges

first day of January last year [which] saw the dawn of a new period ... for the veterans of labour by the payment of the first old age pensions'.<sup>23</sup> The so-called 'new journalism' style of reportage that emerged by the turn of the twentieth century encouraged newspapers to seek out the more personalised human interest side of news stories, rather than documenting them in a detached and authoritative tone, in order to capture larger audiences in an increasingly competitive market.<sup>24</sup> Thus a journalist reporting on the labour exchanges for the halfpenny *Daily News* commented on being 'struck by the sound, business-like demeanour of the men ... There was a look of untold suffering on many faces, and the gleam of hope in many tearful eyes, as I looked down the queue'.<sup>25</sup>

The hopeful reportage provided by the Liberal press in response to the labour exchanges acted as an antidote to other dismal depictions of unemployed men that were also published in the newspapers at the time. The *Westminster Gazette*, an influential Liberal evening newspaper, drew attention to the plight of out-of-work men in February 1910, in addition to their loss of masculine status as provider for their families. Despite the *Westminster Gazette's* status as a moderate rather than outspokenly radical organ, compared with titles such as the *Daily News*, the newspaper's Liberal Imperialist stance was allied with support for a rational programme of social reform, not least in order to address the question of national efficiency.<sup>26</sup> The newspaper explained that men 'willing and anxious to work were wasting time and confidence and strength in fruitless search

**In contrast to these reports, the Liberal newspapers placed much emphasis on the idea that interactions with labour exchanges, unlike relief provided under the draconian Poor Law Amendment Act 1834, helped to positively promote masculine respectability and their head-of-household status.**

for employment, from factory to factory, works to works, and town to town'. This was resulting in 'loss in attrition of self-respect' and 'heavy charges upon the poor-rate for the maintenance of wives and children'.<sup>27</sup> Additionally, one week after the opening of the exchanges a pen portrait by the *Daily Chronicle* drew attention to the fact that the scourge of unemployment meant for many the inability to settle down and acquire the coveted domestic masculine status of husband, father and provider. The article explained that the unemployed man often 'lurks in the cheap lodging-houses' or 'in "apartments for single gentlemen"'. The human-interest article went on to acknowledge the negative emotions of shame, terror and fear that were felt by the unemployed:

The unemployed gentleman ... does not exhibit his poverty, but hides it – hides it with shame, with a terror lest it should be openly revealed, with a haunting fear that it may be seen by people who pass him in the street ... He knows that if he loses his "respectability" all is lost.<sup>28</sup>

In contrast to these reports, the Liberal newspapers placed much emphasis on the idea that interactions with labour exchanges, unlike relief provided under the draconian Poor Law Amendment Act 1834, helped to positively promote masculine respectability and their head-of-household status. The exchanges provided the appropriate conditions to enable willing workers to keep their families together and to maintain their status as domestic patriarchs. Unemployed men often faced periods of separation from their families during the search for employment outside of their locality, or even enforced separation through their eventual admission into the gender-segregated workhouse. However, the *Daily Chronicle* provided details of the new labour exchange procedure, drawing attention to the fact that the focus was upon keeping families together and reducing 'the tramp from town to town in search of employment' at the expense of 'hope, confidence, respectability, and independence'. The newspaper explained that the unemployed man simply needed to register himself once 'at the nearest bureau' and then he might be dispatched immediately to a local job. 'Suppose employment is only to be found at the end of a railway journey', the article continued, 'the Board of Trade has powers to draw upon the Treasury for the expense of such journey, even to the extent of procuring tickets for the workman's family and defraying the cost of the removal of his goods and chattels to the new home in the fresh sphere of labour'. Such costs could then be repaid in small instalments once the workman was settled in employment.<sup>29</sup>

The Liberal labour exchanges were designed to provide both out-of-work men and women with assistance. However, reportage in the Liberal press focused upon male interactions with

the new exchanges, with little more than passing references to the separate facilities provided for women. Reinforcing the adult male breadwinner model, the influential Liberal *Manchester Guardian* noted that 'very few women' were registering to find work at the Stockport exchange.<sup>30</sup> The *Daily News* also explained that 'one of the most noticeable features' at a labour exchange in Leeds 'was the absence of women applicants'. The depiction of this busy exchange as a masculine space was reinforced by the report that at 'about midday the crush outside the building became so great that one of the windows gave way under the pressure, and the police were sent for'.<sup>31</sup> The Conservative press also drew attention to operational difficulties surrounding the opening of the exchanges, but these reports were designed to highlight poor planning. *The Times* noted that arrangements at the exchanges 'were not working as smoothly as could be wished as there were not enough officials to cope with the rush of applicants'.<sup>32</sup> The popular Conservative halfpenny *Daily Mail* also commented on a great 'siege' as men 'struggled to get inside' the new exchanges, with some acknowledging 'the impossibility of registering their names' and leaving disheartened.<sup>33</sup>

As noted above, scenes at the opening of new exchanges in February 1910 – with the presence of journalists and large queues of people ready to interact with the state in a new and beneficial way – caused immediate comparisons to be drawn with the queues of elderly people who arrived at post offices across the country to collect their first state pensions in January 1909. However, there were important differences in the Liberal newspapers' reportage of these two events. It is undoubtedly true that the introduction of old age pensions was commonly discussed in Liberal discourse as a right conferred upon those who had worked hard for the state and paid their taxes, and therefore now, when they were less able, deserved a share in the national wealth. Nevertheless, a non-contributory system of state pensions was by no means universally supported. Even William Beveridge – the future architect of the welfare state – commented that it 'sets up the state in the eyes of the individual as a source of free gifts'.<sup>34</sup> In January 1909 the Liberal press continually used one key word to depict the new pensioners (60 per cent of whom were female) and the stories that they told journalists of their life struggles and current distress: *pathetic*.<sup>35</sup> The newspapers were alluding to the pensioners' pathos and their ability to evoke pity, sympathy and sorrow. Indeed, the human-interest-based stories that the newspapers reported sought to evoke huge sympathy for the emotional distress and physical suffering of many of the pensioners in order to publicly justify the tax-funded pensions. As the *Daily News* observed, 'the little scenes and dialogues which fill the newspapers must have brought home to any who still doubted the immense importance of the pension'.<sup>36</sup> In contrast, detailed accounts of

emotional suffering, job loss and physical injury were absent from reports about the opening of labour exchanges – the dominant emotion associated with the exchanges was not sympathy but rather (as previously alluded to) *hope*.

Hope actually became a highly visible symbol of the labour exchanges. Indeed, discussing the establishment of the exchanges in January 1910, the *Daily News* commented that, ‘green – the colour of hope – is the distinctive hue of the fronts of the new exchanges, both in London and the country’.<sup>37</sup> It was reported that Churchill reiterated this sentiment in speeches that he made outside the newly opened exchanges as he toured London: ‘they are painted in green – the colour of hope’, he explained.<sup>38</sup> Writing on the most esteemed Victorian manly virtue – character – in 1871, Samuel Smiles identified hope as the ‘chiefest of blessings’ and ‘the parent of all effort and endeavour ... It may be said to be the moral engine that moves the world and keeps it in action’.<sup>39</sup> In a 1913 discussion, patience and hope were similarly discussed as ‘the chief requisites in the slow but sure process of Self-development’.<sup>40</sup> Focusing upon hope in their reports, the labour exchanges were therefore not represented by the Liberal newspapers as the apparatus of collectivism or one-way state assistance for unemployed men. The hope-focused reportage actually provided a challenge to traditional narratives of (particularly male) unemployment, which are normally presented in terms of weakness, sadness and helplessness.<sup>41</sup> The hope-focused reportage, with all of hope’s masculine Victorian connotations, served to portray registration at the labour exchanges as a proactive and vital test of individual character and virtue, signifying the ability to independently remain hopeful in the face of adversity.<sup>42</sup>

In contrast to this hope-focused reportage, the Conservative *Daily Mail*’s depiction of the new labour exchanges portrayed them as a cruel and inevitably motivation-sapping experience for great numbers of unemployed men because they only offered false hope. For example, in one letter printed by the newspaper, a correspondent referred to the ‘terrible disappointment to hundreds, possibly thousands, of working men seeking employment’ when they became aware of the limited numbers of jobs actually available at the exchanges. Indicating that this false hope would not provide an energising test of masculine character and virtue, the correspondent continued, ‘I will go as far as to say that the outlook afforded by the labour bureau to a man who has been out of employment for months in some instances may be the last blow which will finally thrust him down among the submerged’.<sup>43</sup>

The Liberal press did draw attention to some hopeless or despairing men, often as single or isolated cases. These men were portrayed as unable to patiently and constructively apply themselves to the job-seeking process for the sake of their

family. Reports about these men were sometimes used to contrast them with, and highlight, the positive characters of the hopeful and independent men who engaged with the exchanges – such men were depicted as in the majority. Indeed, the *Manchester Guardian*’s correspondent explained that, ‘applicants at the exchanges were hopeful, and in most cases appreciative’, although ‘here and there’ a despondent man was met ‘who had been robbed of his delusion that labour exchanges were going to perform the much-craved miracle of the twentieth century and find work for all’.<sup>44</sup> Elsewhere, the *Daily News* reported on a hopeless man from Walthamstow with five children to keep. He was sentenced to a month’s hard labour having sworn at, and then struck, an exchange manager when he was provided with no immediate work.<sup>45</sup> Conversely, *The Star* reported on a man who committed suicide in his front room having been promised work by his labour exchange. ‘He appeared depressed and nervous about undertaking the work after he had been idle so long’, the newspaper explained.<sup>46</sup>

#### National insurance maternity benefits

The opening of new labour exchanges in February 1910 represented the first instalment of the new Liberal three-part programme to relieve distress and prevent destitution for the willing worker and his family. The final stage saw the passing of legislation to introduce unemployment insurance into some trades in 1912.<sup>47</sup> The second stage, the National Insurance Act of 1911, established compulsory insurance for workers over 16 years of age, earning less than £160 per year. This scheme was financed through weekly contributions of 4d. from male workers, or 3d. from female workers, in addition to 3d. from the employer and 2d. from the state. The initiative provided sick pay, entitled workers to free treatment by a doctor and treatment in a sanatorium for tuberculosis. The wife of an insured man was also entitled to a maternity benefit of 30s. The contributions began in July 1912 and the first maternity benefits were paid in January 1913.<sup>48</sup>

The national insurance scheme sought to secure the nation’s working population against illness, adversity and sudden increased pressures on their family budgets. To some extent Liberal discourse surrounding the scheme emphasised the self-help nature of the policy, portraying it as an extension of the drive that had produced friendly and building societies during the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries. Yet the government-led nature of the 1911 compulsory insurance scheme did mean that collectivist rhetoric had a huge role to play,<sup>49</sup> even at the expense of publicly reinforcing notions of manly independence and domestic patriarchy. As the *Liberal Monthly* explained in 1911, the watchword of the ‘great national scheme’ was ‘brotherhood’ and the working man should be motivated by the

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prospect of helping to ‘strengthen the fund and relieve his sick neighbour’.<sup>50</sup> The *Liberal Monthly*’s bold assertion that the party had ‘lifted the latch and entered’ the workman’s cottage came following the introduction of national insurance.<sup>51</sup>

However, in reports surrounding the payment of the first national insurance maternity benefits, provided for the wives of insured men who gave birth from 13 January 1913, the merits of state machinery and collectivism were not focused upon by the Liberal newspapers. Instead, the rhetoric of individual good fortune, bad luck, chance, opportunity and insecurity dominated the newspapers’ human-interest-based coverage of events. This served to discretely disconnect the payments from a planned state intervention, putting a different focus on the occasion. The halfpenny Liberal evening newspaper *The Star* explained on 13 January 1913 that today’s newborn babies were ‘not, at present, old enough to realise the importance of having been born this morning instead of a few ticks of the clock on the Sunday side of midnight’.<sup>52</sup> The sense of good fortune rather than community conscious collectivism surrounding the payment was further highlighted in personal stories provided to the press. A new father told a *Daily News* reporter that, “‘it seems to me that it’s luck, this money – it just fell in at the right time’”. Another father told the reporter of his relief at finding out that his daughter had been born “‘one minute over the time’”.<sup>53</sup> Conversely, a woman discussing the benefits with a

*Star* journalist commented ‘enviously’ that she “‘wished my last [child] had come eight months later’”.<sup>54</sup>

The *Daily News*’ pledge to ‘send a further message of joy and goodwill’ to the first maternity babies also served to add an additional layer of (non-state-funded) excitement and opportunity to the occasion. The newspaper announced that it would devote a total of 200 guineas to be paid in sums of £3 each to the parents of the first ‘benefit baby’ born on 13 January 1913 in seventy towns and districts across Britain.<sup>55</sup> Critics identified newspaper competitions and the ‘artful schemes of stimulating circulation by the distribution of money gifts’ as a ‘journalistic hooliganism’ marking one of the worst gimmicks of the ‘new journalism’, often involving hidden treasure hunts and the creation of public nuisances.<sup>56</sup> The *Daily News* adapted this technique, advertising and promoting excitement surrounding the newspaper, but within a political context and through the more civilised means of requesting that telegrams were sent to the newspaper at the earliest convenience announcing the times of births. The newspaper explained that it ‘relies upon its readers throughout the United Kingdom to make the Bounty known in every home that can possibly be concerned, so that it may fall into the right hands’.<sup>57</sup>

As Pat Thane highlights, the cash maternity benefit was initially only going to be made payable to the insured man himself. However, following a campaign against this policy the benefit

Liberal Party poster advertising the 1911 National Insurance Act

was paid directly to the wife of the insured man when it was finally introduced.<sup>58</sup> Once introduced, the Liberal press continually highlighted that the benefit was to directly aid mothers rather than fathers. On the one hand, this focus can be viewed as part of the wider feminist celebration of an independent monetary resource provided for wives and mothers, which could not be withheld by a brutal or irresponsible husband.<sup>59</sup> On the other hand, or perhaps additionally, this focus in the Liberal reportage served to subtly disconnect working men from this new type of cash handout from the state.<sup>60</sup> *The Star's* correspondent reported a conversation with Dr Richmond, an esteemed doctor in Bermondsey. Implicitly re-establishing masculine independence in the breadwinner role, the doctor explained that, “before to-day the mother would often be back at work a week after the birth of her child. The Insurance Act has altered all this. The invalid will be relieved of all work.”<sup>61</sup> *The Daily Chronicle* discussed the welfare provision under the headlines of ‘New Era For Mothers’ and ‘Mother’s Day’,<sup>62</sup> while the *Star* reporter’s line of questioning was, “What is mother going to do with the 30s?”<sup>63</sup> *The Star* also referred to ‘the thirty shillings maternity benefit which every insurance baby brings its mother’,<sup>64</sup> and the *Daily News* acknowledged the babies ‘whose mothers are insured under Mr. Lloyd George’s beneficent Act’.<sup>65</sup> Reciprocally, the newspapers reported mothers thanking the state for the benefits. One mother pledged to the *Star* reporter that she would name her son “Lloyd George Churchill!”, while another contemplated naming her daughter Georgina ‘with compliments and thanks to Mr. Lloyd George’.<sup>66</sup>

### Conclusions and wider reflections

The exploration of new Liberal press representations provided in this article highlights the value that a gendered lens can offer political history and vice versa – what the study of political identities can contribute to our understanding of gender history. It is fair to conclude that press representations of the new Liberalism largely sought to confirm or reassert the traditional and much valued role of working men as heads of households and providers for their families – the newspapers provided no suggestion that this role was being assumed by the state. The hope – as opposed to sympathy – based reportage accompanying the opening of labour exchanges in 1910, in addition to the absence of extensive reportage about a female presence at the exchanges, helped to reduce any sense of shame or embarrassment surrounding male interactions with the provision. Furthermore, in reports concerning the first maternity payments in 1913 the focus was upon luck and competition as opposed to a planned state intervention. There was also a clear emphasis upon wives and mothers as direct recipients of the maternity benefits rather than fathers as

insured workmen. This helped to bypass any new and difficult questions surrounding the future of masculine independence in the face of state cash handouts.

Through this focus upon women as wives and mothers the press was also presenting women with very traditional domestic identities. Yet importantly, the newspapers did not simply reflect gender norms – they also helped to shape and progress them too. As domestic care and family budgets became the important business of high politics, women were able to develop more public, political identities. Indeed, the newspapers’ human-interest stories surrounding the allocation of the first maternity benefits often put women at the centre of the political stage, empowering them as reporters sought to find out how they would spend their money and why it was needed. Such accounts may well have achieved the desired aim of impacting upon public opinion, in terms of providing vital justification for state intervention into the lives and homes of working people and the poor.

Finally, it is now the intention to provide some tentative observations and wider reflections on how this article can contribute to historiographical debates surrounding the new Liberalism and liberalism with a small ‘l’ into the twentieth century. It is no overstatement to note that the Edwardian new Liberalism has received an enormous amount of attention from historians. J. A. Thompson asserted in 1990 that this area of research was proving so compelling partly because of the ‘ideal battlefield’ that it provided ‘for testing a range of “approaches”, “styles of argument”, and “techniques” ... in the writing of political history’.<sup>67</sup> The new Liberalism laid the foundations of the welfare state in Britain, and it is also closely linked to one of the most perplexing conundrums that the political historian of twentieth-century Britain has grappled with. That is, how to account for the fall of the Liberal Party as a vital force in politics, and its replacement by the Labour Party, consolidated during the inter-war period. Long-running historiographical debates surrounding the Edwardian new Liberalism traditionally focused upon the issue of Liberal decline: a consideration of whether, and the extent to which, the Edwardian period witnessed the emergence of class-based politics (with the formation of the parliamentary Labour Party) and thus the inevitable onset of the Liberal demise. Or, conversely, whether the Edwardian new Liberalism was successful in forging a popular working-class appeal to contain Labour, and it was in fact the First World War that dealt the deathblow to Liberalism.<sup>68</sup>

In more recent decades, developments in the field of the ‘new political history’ – with its post-structuralist emphasis on political identities as unstable and consciously constructed through language and culture – has encouraged a much more nuanced understanding of nineteenth- and

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## Domesticity and the New Liberalism in the Edwardian Liberal press

twentieth-century Liberalism, the emergence of Labour, and the place and continuities of liberalism more widely.<sup>69</sup> In line with these developments, this article has drawn attention to the importance of suspending preconceptions and estimations about the various weaknesses of Edwardian Liberalism, aware of its interwar decline, in order to explore what can be revealed about not only the nature of the new Liberalism, and the relationships between the state and the gendered individual that were being introduced, but also what can be revealed about the presentation and representation of liberalism and popular political debate more widely at the turn of the twentieth century.

This article has highlighted the human-interest based reportage that accompanied the opening of labour exchanges in 1910 and the distribution of maternity benefits in 1913, in addition to the *Daily News*'s maternity benefit competition. The Edwardian Liberal newspapers' presentation of popular politics shown here can be seen as providing an important precursor, and possibly a model, for how mainstream newspapers with leftist sympathies went on to combine accessibility and human interest with meaningful political content

about the state and the individual as the twentieth century progressed. As press historians have shown, popular interwar newspapers such as the *Daily Herald* and the *Daily Mirror*, positioned to varying degrees on the left, sought to combine human interest and readability with serious political discussion in order to convey their liberal messages, aid the growth of the Labour Party and capture large audiences in an increasingly competitive newspaper market.<sup>70</sup> The Edwardian Liberal newspapers' willingness to adapt, innovate and enliven their presentation of politics for the democratic age, (in ways that would help the Labour Party to thrive during the interwar period when the circulation of daily newspapers increased substantially), indicates that the Edwardian Liberals were not culturally stagnant or irrelevant in the face of emerging Labour and mass politics, within the context of the party's newspapers at least.

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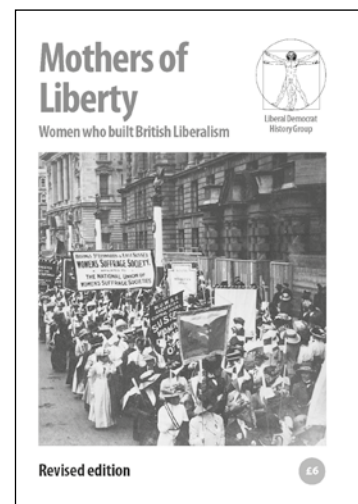
- 1 Charles Booth, *Life and Labour of the People in London*, final vol. (London, 1902), p. 9.
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