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The Impact of Poor Laws and the Workhouse System on Social Welfare in Britain up to 1834

A Dissertation Submitted to the Department of English in Partial Fulfillment for
The Requirements of the Degree of Master in Literature and Civilisation

Submitted by:

Miss Soufari Nour El Houda
Miss Ayachi Romaissa

Supervised by:

Mr. Seddiki Mohammed Cherif

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Dedication 1

This work is humbly dedicated to all my valuable treasures in my life:

My beloved parents for their love and support throughout my life, my lovely sisters, my
dear brother, my little angel, my supportive husband.

Also I would like to dedicate and thank my dear and amazing partner in this work Nour
El Houda, and all my valuable friends who made my journey even better and unforgettable.

Romaissa Ayachi

Dedication 2

This dissertation is dedicated to my family, parents, sister and brother, who have always loved me unconditionally, who have been a constant source of support and encouragement during the challenges of life. I would like also to thank my best friend and partner Romaissa Ayachi for being part of this work.

Soufari Nour El Houda

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Abstract

The present study tries to shed light on the enactment of Poor Laws in Britain. It aims at assessing the circumstances that punctuated the working and living conditions of the lower classes. More importantly, this attempt highlights the responses of the government in favour of the poor. Since this study is about history and politics the appropriate methodology to follow is historical approach, in addition to gathering data and articles and analysing results in order to get a comprehensible dissertation, however the qualitative and historical approaches are the best to follow. The main findings in this thesis are the failure of the Poor Laws in Britain in addition to the abolishment of this relief system.

ملخص

تهدف هذه الدراسة الى تسليط الضوء على تفعيل قوانين الفقراء في بريطانيا, اضافة الى تقييم الظروف المعيشية و المهنية للطبقات الدنيا كما انها تولي اهتماما كبيرا على اهم الاصلاحات التي اتخذتها الحكومة البريطانية لصالح الفقراء . بما ان هذه الدراسة تتمحور حول التاريخي السياسي لذلك فان المنهج التاريخي يعتبر الانسب لاتباعه بالإضافة الى جمع البيانات و المقالات و تحليل النتائج المتحصل عليها. النتائج النهائية لهذه الأطروحة تتمثل في فشل قوانين الفقراء اضافة الى الغاء نظام الاغاثة في بريطانيا.

General Introduction

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The English Poor Laws were considered as a relief system which was meant to deal with the living condition of the lower classes. The Poor Laws started in the 16th century England and prevailed until the end of the World War II and the creation of the welfare state in 1948. Poor laws can be broadly characterized as being parish-centered and locally enforced. In order to make the relief system both more humane and efficient, poor laws used to provide relief in various forms for those unable to care for themselves including the elderly, sick, disabled ,orphans and unemployed , in addition to the establishment of supportive work programs for the able bodied poor . These programs were administered by local parishes.

The poor were classified into 3 categories. First, the impotent poor; were those unable to work, or to take care for themselves such as, the ill, infirm and the elderly. Second, the able-bodied poor; usually referred to those unable to find work because of the lack of skills and experiences. The government attempts to assist this category were mainly based on relief, either in the form of work or money. Third, vagrant or beggars; this category referred to everyone had the ability to work, but refused to find employment and they were viewed as a burden on society and in need of punishment.

In 1830, the state of poverty in England was considered as a state of immorality. As result poor laws were amended to provide workhouse employment for all able-bodied poor. Unfortunately because of the huge efforts provided by the government in order to help and support those capable of working, the living conditions in workhouses became very hard and those in need of help suffered excessively and workhouses as well as the relief system became unable to satisfy the need of the poor in England.

General introduction

The choice to work on The Poor Laws was nurtured by the fact that the poor were actually excluded from the social relief policies under the old system and even though the British government has introduced many regulations in favor of the lower classes, these regulations did not satisfy the needs of the poor.

It's commonly said that the New Poor Law enactment and effectiveness combined with the question of who would benefit from its terms made this relief system a matter of considerable controversy. This dissertation will be revolves around:

- 1- What were the defects of Old Poor Laws that the New Amendments would correct?
- 2- Were these Amendments satisfactory?
- 3- How was the reaction towards these reforms?
- 4- How effective and successful was the New Poor Law?

The English poor laws left a mass eagerness among many writers and scholars. They have seen the Poor Laws as an interesting subject to write about it in their works.

David Englander stated in his book "Poverty and poor Law Reform in Nineteenth – Century Britain", that the Poor Law Amendment Act of 1834 is considered as an important piece of social legislation ever enacted. He explained how the principles of this act and the workhouse system dominated attitudes to welfare provision for the next 80 years. He also explained that the real reasons behind the spread of poverty and the enactment of 1834 reforms were the ineffective solutions provided by the previous relief system combined with the negative effects of the industrial revolution on the British society.

On the other hand, Anthony Brundidge examined in his book " The English Poor Law 1700-1930 ", the way the English poor law system was operated from the early 18th century until

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1930. He said that the old relief system was designed mainly for rural communities, but the New Poor law was more related to the urgent crisis of urban poverty. Among the problems related to social welfare, Anthony Brundidge focused on the medical care and education issues in addition to the role of charity and its support to the application of the poor laws. He also focused on the reactions of the poor toward the workhouse system and explained how the poor laws contributed to the economic development in different sectors.

In addition, Paul slack explained in his book “The English Poor Law 1531-1782 the profound impact of this system on the English society, and how these reforms affected the life style of the lower classes and improved their living conditions. According to Paul slack, poor laws played an important role in determining people’s expectations and assumptions about the social welfare. The book also provided a deep analysis and explanation about the origins of this unique system of welfare and showing its contribution to the English social and political development.

Since this study is about the history and politics, the appropriate methodology to follow is the historical approach, yet gathering data and articles in order to get a comprehensible dissertation; however the quantitative and historical approaches are the best to follow. This dissertation is divided into three chapters, the first one tackles the historical overview on the social system in Britain, and the second chapter includes the onset of Poor Laws, while the third chapter includes the outcomes of the government relief system.

Chapter I:

A Historical Overview on Social System in Britain

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Introduction

A mandatory system of poor relief was established in England during the reign of Elizabeth I. Despite the fact that the main function of poor relief was adjusted by The Poor Law Amendment Act of 1834¹, the poor law continued to help the poor until the creation of the welfare state in 1948². For centuries, the poor law shaped the welfare state in Britain by helping the elderly, children, the sick, disabled, and the unemployed³. This aims at identifying the chief social policies as well as the factors behind poverty and the deterioration of living condition.

1.1. The Origins of Poor Laws

Relief system was a set of reforms provided by the British government in order to help the lower classes. The history of the English Poor⁴ Laws started in 1536. However, there was some legislation that used to handle with the lower classes, before the 15th century. The British government was basically formed by a number of parishes that used to follow the poor laws instructions in order to help the poor. Parliament adopted a mandatory system related to the poor relief that was managed and financed by parishes, such as the acts of 1597- 98 and 1601⁵. These acts were the basis of the relief system until the establishment of The Poor Law amendment Act

¹ An act of the parliament of the United kingdom passed by the Whig government of Lord Melbourne that reformed the country's poverty relief system Boyer, George. «English Poor Laws». EH. Net Encyclopaedia, edited by Robert whaples. May 7, 2002. www.eh.net/encyclopedia/english Poor Laws. Accessed on Jan, 14, 2019.

² Comprises expenditures by the British government intended to improve, health, education, employment and social security. Ibid.

³ Ibid.

⁴ Boyer, George. « «English Poor Laws » ». EH. Net Encyclopaedia, edited by Robert whaples. May 7, 2002. www.eh.net/encyclopedia/english poor Laws. Accessed on Jan, 14, 2019.

⁵ Placed responsibility for the poor more firmly in the hands of the Parish. Ibid.

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in 1834. A number of overseers were responsible about relief management through the evaluation of the poor rate.

Oversees classified the poor into 3 categories: able-bodied adults, children, and the non-able bodied or important. The main function of the Oversees was to provide the able-bodied with work opportunities, educate poor children and provide the non-able bodied with food, clothes and money⁶. Moreover, the British society faced many difficulties related to the economic sector and the Elizabethan Poor Law⁷ was considered as a reaction to the bad economic conditions in Britain, in addition to the end of charitable assistance. The rapid growth of the English population during the 16th century led to the appearance of serious problems such as, inflation and the crisis of coinage debasement in 1526 and 1544-46⁸. From 1490 until 1609, England witnessed a rapid increase in grain prices and nominal wages which led to an unstable economic situation in both agricultural and building sector during the 16th century. The population at that time faced a lot of problems related to their purchasing power especially in 1595-98 which were human as the years of famine. At the same time when the poverty rate increased among the population specially workers, the charitable assistance activities stopped.⁹

The dissolution of the monasteries in 1536-40¹⁰, followed by the dissolution of religious guilds, fraternities, almshouses, and hospitals in 1545-49 “destroyed much of the institutional fabric which had provided charity for the poor in the past”. Because of the hard economic

⁶ Ibid.

⁷ Were administered through parish overseers, who provided relief for the aged, sick, and infant poor, as well as work for the able-bodied in work houses. Boyer, George. “English poor Laws”. ET.Net Encyclopaedia, edited by Robert whales. May 7, 2002. www.eh.net/encyclopedia/english poor Laws. Accessed on Jan, 14, 2019.

⁸ Ibid.

⁹ Ibid.

¹⁰ Set of administrative and legal processes between 1536-1540 by which Henry VIII disbanded monasteries, priories, convents and friaries in England, Wales and Ireland, appropriated their income, disposed of their assets, and provided for their former personnel and functions. Ibid

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situation, parliament attempted to make some reforms such as the Acts of 1597- 98 and 1601¹¹ in order to prevent starvation and other social problems.

1.2. The Implementation of Poor Laws up to 1601

During this period of time, Paul Slack confirmed that parishes were completely concerned with the collection of poor rates in addition to the implementation of the poor law. Some historians stated that, the majority of persons who benefited from the relief system were the elderly, orphans, or widows with young children during the 17th century.

Parishes gave more attention to orphans in the early 17th century, however, by the late seventeenth century; the elderly were the center of interest. Female pensioners outnumbered males by as much as three to one¹². In general, relief spending was based on the payment of weekly pensions in the late 17th century and early 18th century. Able-bodied males will benefit from the relief system under specific conditions such as sickness or unemployment.¹³

In 1662 the Settlement Law was established in England and was called the Poor Relief Act of 1662. This act was based on the idea of not everyone within parishes have the right to benefit from the relief system¹⁴. Parliament ordered parishes to prevent any non- settled persons from the relief system. Adam Smith¹⁵ and other historians argued that parishes were not fair

¹¹ Were a piece of legislation in England and Wales these two legislations provided the first complete code of poor relief and formed the basis of poor relief for the next two centuries. Ibid

¹² « English Poor Laws » EH. Net Encyclopaedia edited by Robert whaples. May 7, 2002.
www.eh.net/encyclopedia/English Poor Laws. Accessed on Feb 15, 2019.

¹³ Ibid.

¹⁴ « English Poor Laws » EH. Net Encyclopedia edited by Robert whaples. May 7, 2002.
www.eh.net/encyclopedia/English Poor Laws. Accessed on Feb 15, 2019.

¹⁵ (1723-1790) was a Scottish philosopher and economist who is best known as the author of an Inquiry into the Nature and causes of the Wealth of Nations (1776), one of the most influential Books ever written.

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concerning the application of the settlement law, by removing only specific migrant such as single women, older workers and men with large families¹⁶.

In the first half of the 18th century, relief costs started to increase rapidly because of the huge increase in pension benefit, as can be seen in table 1. Although prices from 1696 to 1748-50 were dropping and the number of population was increasing slowly; nominal costs increased by 72 percent and real costs increased by 84 percent¹⁷. In some areas a huge number of able-bodied benefited from the relief system, and as a reaction the parliament in 1723 adopted The Workhouse Test Act in order to prevent the poor from applying for relief. This act encouraged parishes to prevent any applicant who refused to enter the workhouse for relief. However, despite of the fact that parishes were trying hard to apply the Workhouse Test Act¹⁸, many paupers were receiving outdoor relief in their own homes¹⁹.

Amendments continued to address the needs of the poor. There were two main legislations during this period. First Gilbert's Act (1782) encouraged parishes to unite and form associations to help the poor in counties. The act was concerned only with relieving the impotent poor in workhouse; the able-bodied were obliged to find work or grant outdoor relief²⁰. The aim of the Gilbert Act was to legitimize the policies of parishes that their system was based on outdoor relief because this system was both less expensive and more humane than the workhouse

¹⁶ « English Poor Laws » EH. Net Encyclopedia edited by Robert whaples. May 7, 2002.
www.eh.net/encyclopedia/English Poor Laws. Accessed on Feb 15, 2019.

¹⁷ Ibid.

¹⁸ Also known as the General Act was poor relief legislation passed by the British government.

¹⁹ « English Poor Laws » EH. Net Encyclopaedia edited by Robert whales. May 7, 2002.
www.eh.net/encyclopedia/English Poor Laws. Accessed on Feb 15, 2019.

²⁰ « English Poor Laws » EH. Net Encyclopedia edited by Robert whaples. May 7, 2002.
www.eh.net/encyclopedia/English Poor Laws. Accessed on Feb 15, 2019.

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relief. Second legislation was The Removal Act of 1795; this act consisted of removing any non-settled person from parishes unless he or she applied for relief²¹.

1.3. Other Forms of Social Relief

During this period, the able-bodied benefited from various forms of relief, one of these forms was: allowances- in- aid- of- wages or the Speenhamland system. Those who have large families will benefit from child allowances and payment for agricultural workers because of their seasonal work. Parish's overseers adopted the speenhamland system in order to help the poor throughout southern England. Berkshire magistrates adopted the Speenhamland system on May 6, 1795. This allowance scale granted a small weekly income for the head of the family (whether employed or unemployed). The level of this income was determined by the price of bread and the size of the family. This system was introduced during 1795-96 and 1800-01, because this period of time witnessed a huge increase in prices and when prices declined, the system was removed²².

In the rural areas, workers were not able to support their large families with their low wages that that is why parishes introduced the child allowance payments²³ in order to help these workers. Workers with four or more children under the age of 10 or 12 were given a small weekly sum paid by typical parishes²⁴.

²¹ Ibid.

²² « English Poor Laws » EH. Net Encyclopedia edited by Robert whaples. May 7, 2002. www.eh.net/encyclopedia/English Poor Laws. Accessed on Feb 15, 2019.

²³ Is 140 per month for each child. If you are getting child benefit for the first time it will be paid at the start of the month following the birth of the child. It is paid for the month your child turns 18.

²⁴ « English Poor Laws » EH. Net Encyclopaedia edited by Robert whales. May 7, 2002. www.eh.net/encyclopedia/English Poor Laws. Accessed on Feb 15, 2019.

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Before 1750, seasonal unemployment²⁵ was considered as major problem for agricultural workers. This problem increased more in the second half of the 18th century. As a reaction to the huge increase in grain prices, farmers increased their specialization in grain production. The problem of seasonal unemployment, in addition to the decline in other sources of income, caused many difficulties for agricultural workers and forced them to apply for poor relief during the winter²⁶.

1.4. Regional Differences in Poor Relief Application

Relief application in Britain witnessed a kind of regional differences. Table 1 explains two major points. The first one related to the per capita relief expenditures in fifteen English counties during 1783-85, 1803, 1812, and 1831. The second point is the relief recipients in 1802-03.

Table 01: Country-level poor Relief Data, 1783-1831.

Country	per capita relief spending (s.) 1783-5	per capita relief spending (s.) 1802-03	per capita relief spending (s.) 1812	per capita relief spending (s.) 1831	Percent of population relieved 1802-03	Share of Recipients over 60 Disable 1802-03	Percent of land in arable farming c.1836	Share of Pop Employed in Agric 1821
North								
Durham	2.78	6.50	9.92	6.83	9.3	22.8	54.9	20.5
Northumberland	2.81	6.67	7.92	6.25	8.8	32.2	46.5	26.8
Lancashire	3.48	4.42	7.42	4.42	6.7	15.0	27.1	11.2
West Riding	2.91	6.50	9.92	5.58	9.3	18.1	30.0	19.6
Midlands								

²⁵ When people are unemployed at particular times of the year when demand for labour is lower than usual.

²⁶ « English Poor Laws » EH. Net Encyclopedia edited by Robert whaples. May 7, 2002.
www.eh.net/encyclopedia/English Poor Laws. Accessed on Feb 15, 2019.

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Stafford	4.30	6.92	8.50	6.50	9.1	17.2	44.8	26.6
Nottingham	3.42	6.33	10.83	6.50	6.8	17.13	na	35.4
Warwick	6.70	11.25	13.33	9.58	13.3	13.7	47.5	27.9
southeast								
Oxford	7.07	16.17	24.83	16.92	19.4	13.2	55.8	55.4
Berkshire	8.65	15.08	27.08	15.75	20.0	12.7	58.5	53.3
Essex	9.10	12.08	24.58	17.17	16.4	12.7	72.4	55.7
Suffolk	7.35	11.42	19.33	18.33	16.6	11.4	70.3	55.9
Sussex	11.52	22.58	33.08	19.33	22.6	8.7	43.8	50.3
Southwest								
Devon	5.53	7.25	11.42	9.00	12.3	23.1	22.5	40.8
Somerset	5.24	8.92	12.25	8.83	12.0	20.8	24.4	42.8
Cornwall	3.62	5.83	9.42	6.67	6.6	31.0	23.8	37.7
England Wales	4.06	8.92	12.75	10.08	11.4	16.0	48.0	33.0

Source: « English Poor Laws » EH. Net Encyclopedia edited by Robert whaples. May 7, 2002.

These counties were mainly specialized in grain production. In the southern counties during 1802- 1803, those who used to receive poor relief were around 15 to 23 percent, however in the north were around 10 percent. Those who benefited from the relief system differed according to regional and demographic characteristics. For example, the relief of the elderly or disabled in the north and west was higher than in the south²⁷.

Economic historians stated that the differences in economic circumstances such as poverty that was considered as major problem in the agricultural south and east counties more than in the pastoral south west or industrial north were the main reasons behind the regional

²⁷ ibid

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differences in relief expenditures. More recently, King (2000) has argued that the regional differences in poor relief were determined not by economic structure but rather by” very different welfare cultures on the part of both the poor and the poor law administrators”²⁸.

1.5. The Poor Law, 1750-1834

England from 1750 to 1820 was characterized by an explosion in relief expenditures. From 1748-50 to 1803 per capita expenditures started to increase until the enactment of The Poor Law Amendment Act in 1834 (table 02). Relief expenditures increased from 1.0%. Of GDP in 1748-50 to a peak of 2.7% of GDP in 1818 -20²⁹. In the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries, the rural south and east of England witnessed a huge change in the demographic characteristics of the pauper host. The number of those used to benefit from casual pensions increased which contradicted with the regular weekly pensions.

Table 2: Relief Expenditures and Numbers on Relief 1696-1936

Year	Expend on Relief (Es)	Real expend per capita of 1803=100	Expend as share of GDP (Slack)	Expend as share of GDP (Lindert)	Number relieved (Official) 1000 s	Share of Pop relieved (official)	Number relieved (Lees) 1000 s	Share pop relieved (Lees)	Share of paupers relieved indoors
1696	400	24.9	0.8						
1748-50	690	45.8	1.0	0.99					
1776	1530	64.0	2.0	1.59					
1783-85	2004	75.6	1.9	1.75					
1803	4268	100.0		2.15	1041	11.4			8.0
1813	6656	91.8		2.58					
1818	7871	116.8							
1821	6959	113.6		2.66					
1826	5929	91.8							

²⁸ Ibid

²⁹ Ibid

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1831	6799	107.9	2.00					
1836	4718	81.1						
1841	4761	61.8	1.12	1299	8.3	2910	18.5	14.8
1846	4954	69.4		1332	8.0	2984	17.8	15.0
1851	4963	67.8	1.07	941	5.3	2108	11.9	12.1
1856	6004	62.0		917	4.9	2054	10.9	13.6
1861	5779	60.0	0.86	884	4.4	1980	9.9	13.2
1866	6440	65.0		916	4.3	2052	9.7	13.7
1871	7887	73.3		1037	4.6	2323	10.3	14.2
1876	7336	62.8		749	3.1	1678	7.0	18.1
1881	8102	69.1	0.70	791	3.1	1772	6.9	22.3
1886	8296	72		781	2.9	1749	6.4	23.3
1891	8643	72.3		760	2.6	1702	5.9	23.2
1896	10216	84.7		816	2.7	1828	6.0	24.0
1901	11549	84.7		777	2.4	1671	5.2	25.9
1906	14036	96.9		892	2.6	1918	5.6	29.2
1911	15023	93.6		886	2.5	1905	5.3	31.1
1921	31925	75.3		627	1.7			35.1
1926	40083	128.3		1331	3.4			17.7
1931	38561	133.9		1090	2.7			21.5
1936	44379	165.7		1472	3.6			12.6

Source: « English Poor Laws » EH. Net Encyclopedia edited by Robert whaples. May 7, 2002.

As we can see in table 2 per capita expenditures in agricultural counties were higher on average than in industrial counties, especially in southern counties such as Oxford, Berkshire, Essex, Suffolk, and Sussex.

The relief system was mainly concerned with younger pauper from 20 to 59 years old and those who have over 60 years old were excluded. The benefits of the male from the relief system increased from about a third in 1760 to nearly two-thirds in 1820 in the south and east. The

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north and west also were concerned with big changes toward prime-age males and casual relief; however the extent of these changes was smaller than other regions³⁰.

Conclusion

A great debate started among economists and social theorists due to the increasing pressure on the poor rates. They started discussing the real reasons of poverty and the possibilities for reforming the function of the old poor law. Thanks to this debate, many parliamentary inquiries were inspired into the question of poor relief. The increase in spending on poor relief in the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries, combined with the attacks on the Poor Laws by Thomas Malthus and other political economists and the agricultural laborers' revolt of 1830-31 (the Captain Swing riots), led the government in 1832 to appoint the Royal Commission to Investigate the Poor Laws. The Commission published its report, written by Nassau Senior and Edwin Chadwick, in March 1834. The report, described by historian R. H. Tawney (1926) as "brilliant, influential and wildly unhistorical," called for sweeping reforms of the Poor Law, including the grouping of parishes into Poor Law unions, the abolition of outdoor relief for the able-bodied and their families, and the appointment of a centralized Poor Law Commission to direct the administration of poor relief. Soon after the report was published Parliament adopted the Poor Law Amendment Act of 1834, which implemented some of the report's recommendations and left others, like the regulation of outdoor relief, to the three newly appointed Poor Law Commissioners.

³⁰ Ibid.

Chapter II:

The Onset of the New Poor Law

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During the nineteenth century, England witnessed a rising tendency towards empowering institutions. These institutions were mainly designed to control an individual's behaviour in an appropriate environment. Conditions as such gave much importance to the moral values of its inmates and it was constructed by the various poor Laws authorities¹.

The workhouse idea was known before 1834, but due to some parliamentary enquires into the poor Laws, the idea of the workhouse became the basis of the social relief system in the mid-nineteenth century. The burden of the Poor rates was the main problem during this period of time and in order to solve this problem during this period of time and in order to solve this problem workhouses provided a deterrent to prevent the over use of poor relief. The workhouse was considered as a national response to perceive and solve problems within society. The problems were mainly related to the character and moral make-up of individuals rather than problems within society itself. The workhouse system became a major governmental response to the question of poor relief.² This chapter tries to focus on the major problems of the poor during this period of time and the way workhouse applied the relief system and provided effective solutions to these problems.

¹ Piddock .S. Accommodating the Destitute the New Poor Law and the Workhouse in England, Retrieved from <http://accomodatingthedestitutetheNewPoorLawandtheworkhouseineEngland>.

² Ibid.

Chapter II: The Onset of the New Poor Law

1.1. Amending the Poor Laws from 1832 onwards

The establishment of the Royal commission³ was in February 1832. Its main function or task was inquiring into the administration and practical operation of the Poor Laws. According to the commission Knott in their research, the main reason behind rises in Poor rates was the large scale out-doors relief which debased the Old Poor Laws. The main intention of the commission Knott was to prove their opinion, and Henrique's supported their view. Twenty-six Assistant Commissioners started their research by focusing on the rural counties and some urban areas; however the lack of parish records prevented the Assistant commissioners from completing their research especially in the industrial North.⁴ In 1833, some information received by his Majesty's Commissioner was published. An assistant commissioner known as Edwin Chadwick⁵ was the one who composed a third of this report, in which he provided a detailed plan in order to reform the Old Poor Law. In his report six conclusions were provided, and all of them were completely against the allowance system on both moral and economic level.⁶

In his attack on the Old Poor Law, Chadwick provided a complete description "that the existing system of Poor Laws in England is destructive of the industry, forethought and honesty of labourers; to the wealth and the mortality of the employers of labour and of the owners of property; and the mutual goodwill and happiness of all", and he suggested that getting rid of the parish system and replacing it with a central authority with paid officers in order to manage the Poor Laws throughout England is the best solution to reform the Poor Laws system. Chadwick

³ They were a group set up to decide how to change the Poor Law system in England and Wales.

⁴ Piddock .S. Accommodating the destitute the New Poor Law and the workhouse in England, Retrieved from <http://accomodatingthedestitutetheNewPoorLawandtheworkhouseineEngland>

⁵ (1800- 1890) was an English social reformer who is noted for his leadership in reforming the Poor Laws in England and instituting major reforms in urban sanitation and public health.

⁶ Piddock .S. Accommodating the Destitute the New Poor Law and the workhouse in England, Retrieved from <http://accomodatingthedestitutetheNewPoorLawandtheworkhouseineEngland>

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stated that relief for the able-bodied should be stopped in order to repeal the allowance system⁷. This plan would guarantee the immediate decrease in the number of paupers, in addition to the use of money previously taken as poor rates to pay wages. The smaller number of paupers would facilitate the use and the distribution of the poor rates. As reaction to Edwin Chadwick plan and its positive impact⁸ on the British society, he was appointed to the position of Royal Commissioner and he started working on the final report of the commission.⁹

On February 21st 1834, the final Report of the Royal Commission related to the Poor Laws was officially given to the House of Commons. The aim of the report was to end the old Poor Laws or poor relief, but to reveal the weaknesses of the system since its enactment and correct them according to new basis and principles. The abolition of poor relief was “repugnant to the common sentiments of mankind”. Correcting, reforming and re-establishing the Old Poor Law principles of relief were the significance of this report. These reforms had major expectations from both the Royal Commission and the lower classes. These expectations can be summarized in two major elements the reduction in the number of paupers and the allowance system will be abolished and replaced by a new system based on a free labour market and the principle of less eligibility. The main focus of this system was the workhouse.

The creation of a free labour market¹⁰ would have a lot of benefits, especially for the farmers, but these benefits cannot be achieved without segregating pauper labour and made them less attractive. The report's reforms were aiming at making the relief system completely

⁷ Ibid.

⁸ Piddock .S. Accommodating the destitute the New Poor Law and the workhouse in England, Retrieved from <http://accomodatingthedestitutetheNewPoorLawandtheworkhouseineEngland>

⁹ An economic system in which prices are determined by unrestricted competition between privately owned businesses.

¹⁰ Piddock .S. Accommodating the Destitute the New Poor Law and the workhouse in England, Retrieved from <http://accomodatingthedestitutetheNewPoorLawandtheworkhouseineEngland>.

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unattractive in which only the needy people would apply for relief. This was founded on the principle of “less-eligibility” which had been suggested by Jeremy Bentham. That’s why the workhouse needed to be used as a test of pauperism and as a place to apply the idea of less attractive work in order to ensure the opinions mentioned by Jeremy Bentham and Chadwick.

The central board of commissioners¹¹ decided to form parishes into new Poor Law Unions under its administration and provide these unions with the financial resources in order to create or build the necessary workhouse. The central board would have different functions such as, instructing the unions, considering cases, managing both the workhouse and the distribution of poor relief, in addition to the creation of uniformity throughout England. A board of Guardians would be elected in order to govern the Poor Law Unions. The quantity and quality of relief given to the poor, as well as where and when it would be give, was probably one of the most important functions of the central board commissioners.

The process of giving poor relief witnessed a fundamental shift in which relief started to be given by a central government authority rather than to local authorities as represented by the Parishes.¹² Many figures contributed to the concept of the new workhouse with their different ideas. The Reverends Lowe and Becher came with idea of relief in return for work and Jeremy Bentham proposed new principles of classification in workhouses and Chadwick tried to expand all these ideas into the concept of the new workhouse. Each Poor Law Union would be divided into four workhouses one for the aged and infirm, one for children, one for able-bodied men and one for the able-bodied women.¹³ The accommodation inside the workhouse of the old Poor Law

¹¹ Pidcock .S. Accommodating the Destitute the New Poor Law and the workhouse in England, Retrieved from <http://accomodatingthedestitutetheNewPoorLawandtheworkhouseineEngland>.

¹² Ibid.

¹³ A geographical territory and early local government unit in the United Kingdom. It existed in England and Wales from 1834 to 1930 for the administration of poor relief.

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faced different problems such as the interaction of all classes with each other that can have a negative impact on the children daily life behaviours, immoral practices can be occurred inside the workhouse; the elderly can be annoyed by the noise of both adults and children.

The New Poor Law ended and solved these problems by separating workhouses in which each category would receive relief without causing any dissatisfaction among other classes or categories. In order to finance the four workhouses, Poor Laws Unions¹⁴ transformed small workhouses and other buildings into new workhouses in order to provide a particular group with their essential needs, and the internal sub division was not allowed. Schools would be established in workhouses in order to educate the children, whom the sick would receive a special care inside hospitals-like buildings and almshouses would be the most comfortable place for the aged.¹⁵

The able-bodied were to be the priority of the workhouses, which was considered as a deterrent effect of this system. The living standards were the main focus of many historians. They argued if these standards would better or worse than that of the labourer. Finer¹⁶ stated that Chadwick's vision towards workhouses was completely different contemporaries, rather than describing workhouses as "an object of wholesome horror", he saw them as suitable places with reasonable standard of living, much better than the standards of the independent labourer. However, all historians had the same opinion concerning the main principle of the workhouse life, which was to be task work. This task work had the meaning of soul destroying. Independent labourers would definitely prefer to enter the workhouse.

¹⁴ Piddock .S. Accommodating the destitute the New Poor Law and the workhouse in England, Retrieved from <http://accomodatingthedestitutetheNewPoorLawandtheworkhouseineEngland>.

¹⁵ Professor of political institutions at the University College of North Staffordshire.

¹⁶ Piddock .S. Accommodating the Destitute the New Poor Law and the workhouse in England, Retrieved from <http://accomodatingthedestitutetheNewPoorLawandtheworkhouseineEngland>.

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Relief was only provided for those inside the workhouse system and in order to reinforce effect of this system, the whole family is obliged to enter the workhouse, if the father or husband receive any form of relief, for children is considered as relief for the parents, and this process led to admission into this system.¹⁷ The use of the deterrent workhouse was mainly to prevent the able-bodied labourers from the workhouse services. This category can help their families through the use of other self-help schemes such as saving banks¹⁸ and friendly societies.¹⁹

In 1837 another committee was selected in order to evaluate the working process of the New poor Law and they reported favourably: “(we are) convinced that the upmost benefit has resulted from the general adoption of this system of relief”: This report did not mean that the New Poor Law was positively seen by everyone, rather it was seen by those in the house of parliament as a viable system.

1.2. Poor Laws Examination

In their first Annual report, Poor Law Commissioners designed plans for four model workhouse. The architect Sampson kempthorne²⁰ worked on three plans and the fourth one was designed sir Francis head, who was appointed as an Assistant commissioner in October 1834. Sir Francis Head, who was appointed as an Assistant Commissioner in October 1834. He tried to create a unique design for the Workhouse. The plans were based on observability and strict

¹⁷ A financial institution whose primary purpose is accepting savings deposits and paying interest on those deposits.

¹⁸ Is a mutual association for the purposes of insurance, pensions, savings or cooperative banking. It is a mutual organization or benefit society composed of a body of people who join together for a common financial or social purpose.

¹⁹ Piddock .S. Accommodating the Destitute the New Poor Law and the workhouse in England, Retrieved from <http://accomodatingthedestitutetheNewPoorLawandtheworkhouseineEngland>

²⁰ Was an English architect who specialized in the design of workhouses, before his emigration to New Zealand.

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classification in which the responsible for the workhouse would have a complete control over the discipline of his charges, and this idea was previously mentioned by Jeremy Bentham in his panopticon models.

Wythen Baxter in his work described poverty as being crime because of abuses occurring in workhouses. He criticized the workhouse design starting from high walls surrounding them. This image reinforced his opinion about the possibility of abuses against the poor.²¹ However; the Poor Law Commissioners denied all these claims and emphasized the disciplinary aspects of the workhouses and ensuring that the use of any physical punishment is unacceptable behaviour in the workhouses²².

The Poor Law Report stated that the new workhouses should be separated and in order to reduce costs former poor houses were to be rebuilt or renewed. However; this plan was cancelled because of the bad conditions of the old poor houses. As result, started building new houses through the use of loans provided by the Treasury.²³ Many designs were provided for the new workhouses, but the most popular one according to the Boards of Guardians was that of Kempthorne's cruciform design because of its extra wings and storeys. The Idea of separate workhouses was not successful as it was expected.

Many obstacles appeared such as the falling of the construction costs which led to the building of only one workhouse for all paupers most of the time. Another obstacle was the refusal and resistance of the paupers, as well as the new Union officials to the idea of separate classes within the workhouse system. Many families found the idea of separating their members

²¹ Piddock .S. Accommodating the Destitute the New Poor Law and the workhouse in England, Retrieved from <http://accomodatingthedestitutetheNewPoorLawandtheworkhouseineEngland>.

²² Ibid.

²³ Piddock .S. Accommodating the destitute the New Poor Law and the workhouse in England, Retrieved from <http://accomodatingthedestitutetheNewPoorLawandtheworkhouseineEngland>.

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and putting them in different houses or even different parishes was very distressing idea. However; the Board of Guardians saw the idea of separate houses as a way for more employees and higher salary costs, which led again to the rise of pressure on the poor rates-Among the few places where can find separate houses was in the Union of Oakfield²⁴. Many houses were established with the Union of Oakfield, such as a house for the old and infirm, an infirmary, a house for able-bodied women, schools for girls and boy, and a workhouse for able-bodied males. The Poor Law Commissioners considered the strict classification of classes as an important aspect since there is only one large workhouse²⁵.

The system of classification provided by the workhouse Rules order of 1842 was as follows: men infirm through age any other cause, able-bodies males over fifteen years, boys between the ages of seven and fifteen ,women infirm through age or any other cause, able-bodied females over fifteen years, girls between the ages of seven and fifteen, and children under seven.

In this context The Poor Law Commissioners insisted that must be entire and absolute separation between the sexes, who are to live, sleep and take their meals in totally distinct and separate parts of the building, with an enclosed yard of each.”²⁶The number of paupers accommodated in the workhouses was around three hundred in addition eighty paupers at the workhouses of both carthenington and Southampton.

During the period 1935-36, The Poor Law Commissioners gave their order to construct one hundred and twenty-seven workhouses, furthermore, a huge alteration and enlargement occurred within the existing buildings in another seventy-eight Unions. Despite the fact that, the

²⁴ Ibid.

²⁵ Piddock .S. Accommodating the destitute the New Poor Law and the workhouse in England, Retrieved from <http://accomodatingthedestitutetheNewPoorLawandtheworkhouseineEngland>.

²⁶ Ibid.

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Poor Law Commissioners didn't give any official date for the ceasing of out-door relief in favour of the workhouse, Unions prevented all forms of out-door relief for the able-bodied men by the mid-August 1836. The number of the constructed workhouses reached a total of 341 from 1834 to 1840 and 544 between 1835 and 1883.²⁷

1.3. The Workhouse and its Conditions

The workhouse was described as a “Home” for the lower classes. This system was intended to help all the needy people except for the able-bodied man, who were not able to help or support themselves with the cessation of out-door relief. In December 1844, the Poor Law Commission prohibited the outdoor relief system with some exceptions classified as follows: those taken ill suddenly or who had an accident, widows in the first six months after their husband's death, widows with legitimate children and families with husband in the armed services.²⁸ The largest number inside the workhouses was of the aged and infirm category. These two categories became permanent resident within new workhouses. Strict conditions were followed in the workhouse such as, separating the married elderly from each other and prohibiting any differences in rations for the aged.

In 1861, a survey stated that the number of adults “old and infirm” in the workhouses in both England and Wales has reached fifth of the population “around 14.000” and around 5.000 of them were classified as mentally ill.²⁹ Women without financial support, or children or even pregnant used to be part of these workhouses. However, the accommodation of these women was not based on any form of medical care or even minimal care. Children from different categories,

²⁷ *ibid*

²⁸ *ibid*

²⁹ *ibid*

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orphans, abandoned children, illegitimate children of female inmates were also accommodated in workhouses. Another category was that of the sickly or disabled were temporarily accommodated as their parents could not support them.

In 1889 the number of children under sixteen years old reached 54.000 ³⁰ for children, life inside workhouses was not better than the one outside. They were living under harsh and strict conditions that could not be handled even from the able-bodied adults and these rules were mainly based on moral aspects or training. As way of help, the workhouse provided the able-bodied individual with task in return for rations and a bed. The able-bodied men who were previously classified as beggars, tramps and vagrants used the workhouse under the name of casuals. In exchange for a number of hours work, many workhouses especially those located in large cities such as London offered basic sleeping accommodation and rations.³¹ A large number of people saw the workhouse as their home even if its original design was not intended for this reason. The Poor Law did not set any guidance rules in order to help those dealing with people seeking relief. That's why the boards of Guardians suggested the Labour test as the best solution to help non-residents getting ticket for relief. The activities used in this Labour test were stone breaking and oakum-picking.³²

1.4. The Workhouse in the Mid-Nineteenth Century

The Poor Law system had received a lot of criticism, opposition, and violence in some parts of England during the nineteenth century; people started criticising the fact that those workhouses were the only source of poor relief. People were totally against the main principle

³⁰ Ibid

³¹ Ibid

³² Ibid

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of less-eligibility used in workhouses because of its inappropriate treatment of those living in, especially the aged and children. The workhouse visiting society³³ focused more on the hard situation of the aged and infirm in the workhouses: «It is not an uncommon thing to find persons who have spent eight, nine or eleven years in one ward or in one bed”.

The provision for the sick was also another problem focused on by the visiting society:” we have hardly yet begun to look upon the workhouse as a home and lasting resting place for those who cannot be help in hospitals.... and if they have no homes where they can be nursed....must end their days in the wards of the workhouse infirmary”³⁴.By the mid-nineteenth century the nature of the workhouse system witnessed an undergoing change. The physical ability was the main condition required in order to perform any kind of schemes such as task work inside any institutions. As was mentioned before, the use of labour in order to reform the lazy and inactive people was the main focus of the workhouse and its daily activities.

The money spent on the maintenance of those living in workhouses would be recompensed by their labour or daily activities³⁵.After thirty two years of the operation of the New Poor Law this concept that was adopted by Edwin Chadwick and other poor reformers was diverted even in England, Dr Edward Smith, a medical inspector for the Poor Law Board, was to comment : workhouse are now asylums and infirmaries, and not places where work is necessarily exacted in return for food, appreciated, that the very term “workhouse” has fallen into disuse, and the word “union” has been substituted for it.³⁶

³³ An organization set up in 1858 which existed to improve moral and spiritual improvement of workhouse inmates in England and Wales.

³⁴ Piddock .S. Accommodating the destitute the New Poor Law and the workhouse in England, Retrieved from <http://accomodatingthedestitutetheNewPoorLawandtheworkhouseineEngland>.

³⁵ Ibid.

³⁶ Piddock .S. Accommodating the destitute the New Poor Law and the workhouse in England, Retrieved from <http://accomodatingthedestitutetheNewPoorLawandtheworkhouseineEngland>.

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Many reasons were responsible for this diversion, but the main reason was the reformers failure to determine those really in need for poor relief and its associated care. Criticism towards workhouses became much wider and bigger to include other institutions such as prisons, schools and asylums. The fact of the moral regulation was very important for the founders of these institutions and in order to achieve this moral regulation, The establishment of family-sized institutions, whether in villages or the country became the next goal.³⁷

In fact, this goal was the previous vision of the workhouse institutions given by Chadwick in 1834. His vision consisted on the idea of treating and housing all different classes separately-however, this idea did not come true because providing such buildings needed a high costs that were not available at that time³⁸.

Conclusion

From its beginning in the nineteenth century, the concept of the workhouse went through many changes and different stages. Its first form was as almhouses and Houses of Industry and then it transformed to be a home for those unable to care for themselves such as the sick, aged, mentally ill or children. The main focus of the workhouse system was the nature of poverty and this focus was mainly influenced by the moral divisions in the society. Society classified the poor into two main categories first, the respectable and deserving poor, who used to work hard in order to help themselves second, the unrespectable and undeserving poor who need to improve themselves through hard work in order to have their own moral character. Applying for poor relief and keeping in need for help were the stigma of the workhouse.

³⁷ Ibid.

³⁸ Piddock .S. Accommodating the destitute the New Poor Law and the workhouse in England, Retrieved from <http://accomodatingthedestitutetheNewPoorLawandtheworkhouseineEngland>.

Chapter III:

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The treatment of the poor in Britain before the major 19th century laws depended on a large element of charity. The middle class paid a Parish poor rate and often saw the increasing poverty of the era merely as a financial worry they often wanted the cheapest, or most cost effective, way of treating the poor. There was a little engagement with the causes of poverty, which ranged from illness, poor education, disease, disability, underemployment, and poor transport preventing movement to regions with more jobs, to economic changes which removed domestic industry and agricultural changes which left many without jobs. Poor harvests caused grain prices to rise, and high housing prices led to greater debt¹.

1.1. The State of Poverty Relief before the 19th Century

Britain largely viewed the poor as one of two types. The deserving poor, those who were old, handicapped, infirm or too young to work, were, and their numbers stayed more or less even across the 18th century. On the other hand, the able-bodied who were without work were considered undeserving poor, thought of as lazy who could have got a job if they needed one. People simply didn't realize at these points how the changing economy could affect workers. Poverty was also feared. Some worried about deprivation, those in charge worried the increase in expenditure needed to deal with them, as well as widely perceived threat of revolution and anarchy².

¹«British Poor Law Reform in the Industrial Revolution », www.thoughtco.com/British/Poor/Laws/reforme/industrial/Revolution Accessed on April 3, April2019.

² Ibid.

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1.1. The Failure of the Old Poor Law and the Push to Reform:

The Old Poor Law resulted in the absence a real system. As everything was based on the parish, there was a huge amount of regional diversity. Some areas used mainly outdoor relief, some provided work for the poor, and others used workhouses. Substantial power over the poor was given to local people, who ranged from honest and interested to dishonest and bigoted. The whole poor law system was uncountable and unprofessional³. Poverty was far from a new problem when steps were taken to reform the poor law in the 19th century, but the industrial revolution had changed the way poverty was viewed and the impact it had.

The rapid growth of dense urban areas with their problems of public health, housing crime, and poverty was clearly not suited to the old system.⁴

One pressure to reform the poor relief system came from the rising cost of the poor rate which rapidly increased. Poor-rate payers began to see poor relief as a financial problem, not fully understanding the effects of war, and poor relief grew to 2% of the Gross National Income.⁵ This difficulty was not spread evenly over England, and the depressed south, near London was hit hardest. In addition, influential people were beginning to see the poor law as out of date, wasteful, and a threat to both the economy and free movement of labor, as well as encouraging large families, idleness, and drinking. The swing riots of 1830⁶ further encouraged demands for new harsher, measures on the poor, because the cost of the poor law was increasing every year by 1830 it cost about 7 million and criticism of the poor law was

³«British Poor Law Reform in the Industrial Revolution », www.thoughtco.com/British/Poor/Laws/reforme/industrial/Revolution Accessed on April 3, 2019 .

⁴Ibid

⁵ibid

⁶A wide-spread uprising in 1830 by agricultural workers in southern and eastern England, in protest of agricultural mechanisation and other harsh conditions.

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mounting. Ratepayers started complaining that money went to people who were lazy and did not want to work. It was said that the old Poor Law encouraged laziness and irresponsibility among the poor⁷.

1.2. Reasons behind the Failure of the Old Poor Law

The late eighteenth century marked the failure of the Old Poor Law. It was clear that Old Poor Law was its basic nature. The Old system was characterized by being parochial in its basis, those who need help used to receive a kind of paternal care, which was originated from the nature or the basis of society in pre-Industrial Revolution England, the generosity and flexibility become economically unviable, because all the increasing demands were placed on the poor rates.⁸ Those who used to write about the Old Poor Law said that relief in aid of wages was the reason behind its failure. One of the most blamed systems was the Speenhamland parish, which used relief as a tool to supplement a person's wages. At that time the price of a large gallon loaf of bread was the main standard in order to determine the rates of relief.

It is true that the speenhamland system took the responsibility of provoking the relief system, but at the same time there were some evidences mentioned by Rnott that allowances in aid of wages were already used for a century and a half before the enactment of the speenhamland system. Speenhamland was considered as the best choice for those needing relief, because the early workhouses already received hate and were seen as a form

⁷ «British Poor Law Reform in the industrial Revolution », www.thoughtco.com/British/Poor/Laws/reforme/industrial/Revolution Accessed on April 3, April 2019.

⁸ Piddock. S. Accommodating the destitute the New Poor Law and the Workhouse in England Retrieved from <http://academiaedu/27086720/AccomonodatingtheNewPoorLawandtheworkhouseinEngland>.

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of punishment by those intended to occupy them. The speenhamland allowance system was used to show the exhaustion on poor rates, but the situation was getting worse⁹.

In 1796 the England Parliament worried about the rebellions in France during the Revolutions and had some concerns about similar events in England that might destruct the comfort and domestic situation of the poor. Many decisions were made such as authorized the magistrates to countermand the refusal of any parish overseer to relieve any applicant they considered deserving. As result, they burden on poor rates started to be very overwhelming; in 1793 the government spend around two million pounds on poor relief in England and Wales, in 1803, four million pounds were spend and by 1832 in had reached seven million pounds.¹⁰

1.3. Malthus and Bentham: Debate about Poor Relief

During the eighteenth century, the question of the nature of poverty and the forms of relief that should be taken by the British Parliament had been a focus of discussion in both pamphlets and books. Specific schemes were debated by different authors concerning the reform of poor relief and its administration, when we're trying to present and explain their own ideas and views about the nature and the real reasons of poverty. The debate and the views of the writers were to vary over the eighteenth century, and during the economic stress in England, their discussion becomes more intense. The debate over poverty and the Old Poor Law during the early nineteenth century was led by two main figures The Reverend Thomas Robert Malthus¹¹ and Jeremy Bentham¹², these tow figures had a great influence on those responsible of

⁹Ibid.

¹⁰Ibid.

¹¹ (1766- 1834), English economist and demographer who is best known for his theory that population growth will always tend to outrun the food supply and that betterment of human kind is impossible without stern limits on reproduction.

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reforming the Old Poor Law. The general picture of the debate and the changing views of the lower classes in the British society were reflected by the writings of these two figures.¹³

In 1798, The Reverend Thomas Robert Malthus published his work “An Essay on the principle of population, as it Affects the Future Improvement of Society”. In this work he tried to develop his natural view or law concerning the growth of populations. He believed that populations had the ability to grow at a rate that is bigger than the rate of increase in subsistence: «Population growth was only restrained within the limits of subsistence by the operation of natural checks, misery and vice»¹⁴.

In 1803, his second essay was published entitled “An Essay on the principle of Population, or a view of its past and present Effects on Human Happiness”. With the increasing of the agricultural crops, he supported the complete abolition of Poor Laws. He also rejected the idea of workhouses and he believed that the undeserving poor were: “deservedly at the bottom in the scale of society”; and: “They should on no account be enable to command so much of the necessities of life as can be obtained by the wages of common labour”. The right to relief was only for those who really deserved to be relieved by giving them charity. Small voluntary charities were asked to select carefully the recipient of this charity. Malthus point of view and arguments were followed and supported by the select committee on Labourers “wages” held in 1824, claiming that the bad economic condition is due to the over population, in addition to the

¹² An English philosopher and political radical. He is primarily known today for this moral philosophy especially his principle of utilitarianism, which evaluates actions based upon their consequences.

¹³ *ibid*

¹⁴ *ibid*

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subsidization of wages and allowances for children was the reason behind the rise of large families.¹⁵

Thomas Robert Malthus and Thomas Ruggles's work "A History of the Poor (1793), is characterized by containing a strong moral element in their arguments. Through the main components of each individual's behaviour and character, they observed the living conditions of these individuals. During the late eighteenth century and the nineteenth century, the idea of moral division was present in the authors writing and debate on poor relief. According to this moral division, the poor were divided into two main groups, the deserving and the undeserving, and this division impacted later on the creation of the New Poor Law of 1834. The Right Reverend John Brid Sumner explained about this division in his work *Treatise on the Records of creation*, published in 1818.¹⁶ Knott sums up Sumner's view as follows: "That God had created the world and the laws of nature not to provide indolent satiety, but as a sphere where virtue might be exercised under the pressure of adversity".

He stopped recommending the total abolition of the Old Poor Law, which it was ineffective. He saw that the Law can be replaced by enlightened charity, education, friendly society, saving banks self-help schemes. His vision was that through such schemes and institutions, men will have the ability to help themselves and their families through hard work that can help them to build their future.¹⁷ English writers discussed the nature of poverty through their books and pamphlets, and the Reverend Sumner's work encouraged the self-help through hard work and financial planning in order to reach a great social reform. The government faced a

¹⁵ibid

¹⁶ibid

¹⁷ibid.

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lot of difficulties in order to start and maintain these schemes such as the realities of wages and social conditions at that time.

In the English society poverty was viewed as a natural state that would always exist, but at the same time we cannot deny the fact that some individual contributed to their own social conditions through undesirable behaviour, such as drunkenness and idleness.¹⁸ The question of poor relief divided people into two main categories, first, those who had paternalistic point of view. Second, those who were against the system and asked for deterrent or punitive measures.

The Destitute Board was about to take both approaches or points of view into consideration by providing relief for those who were truly in need for help, while taking the indoor accommodation as place to test those they were not sure or certain about their cases.¹⁹ Jeremy Bentham, a leading radical philosopher and social reformer. He defined the nature of poverty and its aspects in a different and more detailed way than many writers at that time, through separating the concept of poverty from indigence. Unlike other writers such as Malthus, Bentham did not ask for the abolition of the Old Poor Law. Instead he believed that enacting legislation was important in order to guarantee relief and prevent starvation among the poor, but the allowance system: “Offered the idle and negligent exactly the same economic rewards as the diligent and the industrious”.²⁰

For this reason the system should be abolished. The workhouse was about to take on a new form in Bentham’s “Pauper Management Improved” (included in his works vol 8 also called the works of Jeremy Bentham).

¹⁸ Ibid

¹⁹ Ibid

²⁰ Ibid

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His point of view or plan was mainly to develop a centrally governed poor relief system, which was completely based on the Panopticon Workhouses.²¹ These panopticons were based on “central inspect ability”, and were designed to hold 2,000 inmates. The inmates of these Panopticon workhouses were classified into different categories: the diseased and healthy, the males and females, and concerning the moral aspects of poverty we have also two categories: the morally corrupt and the innocent, the poor and the poorer. The release of these inmates was restricted by specific conditions such as performing profitable labour. Throughout England five hundred panopticons were affected by Bentham’s plan. Panopticons were administered by a National Charity Company, which was responsible of reducing poor rates and repay the cost of the erection of the panopticons. However; Bentham did not achieve his goal and build these panopticons despite the fact that his plan was considered by a Parliamentary Committee in 1811, they found another plan in order to classify and control the poor according to a specific principles in the Report of the Poor Law Royal Commission of 1832.²²

1.4. The Failure of the New Poor Law

The formers of the New Poor Law planned to design separate institutions for those requiring care such as the aged, sick and children without knowing that workhouses would exclude those really in need of help, and use them as a product of economic decisions which had a great impact on both their design and operation.²³ Despite the fact that attitudes towards poverty and its treatment in society as a whole have changed, no alternative suggestion was

²¹A type of institutional building and a system of control designed by the English philosopher and social theorist Jeremy Bentham in the late 18th century.

²²Piddock. S. Accommodating the destitute the New Poor Law and the workhouse in England Retrieved from <http://academiaedu/27086720/AccommodatingtheNewPoorLawandtheworkhouseinEngland>.

²³ Ibid.

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provide in order to use the build environment as a way to modify behaviour and provide safety and home for those in need until they would be able to support themselves.

During the nineteenth century, the almshouses, poor houses and Houses of Industry were to be placed by the New Poor Law's workhouses and training institutions for children. In the late nineteenth century poor law reformers revealed the exact and real nature of the living conditions inside the workhouses in order to pave the way to the establishment of the old age homes idea. Every time a certain type of institution was suggested by the reformers in order to determine who need and who would receive relief.²⁴

1.5. The Outcomes of the New Poor Law

Obviously the limitations of outdoor relief given to the able-bodied paupers have brought many difficulties and hardships to this category unless they were able to find another means of support. Members of the Poor Law Commissioners stated that in many regions, those who used to receive outdoor relief were already working in order to maintain themselves and their families. It was clear that the workhouse was a place in which anyone would willingly go however; the lard conditions of the paupers with no income and no job with regard to the maintaining of their families, forced them to enter the workhouse.²⁵

It is impossible to know the degree or the extent of hardships faced by the poor because even if the labouring classes were benefiting from the establishment of the Poor Law Amendment Act, this category had another source of support which means that only the lower classes were suffering from the Amendment Act without any protection specially with the

²⁴Ibid.

²⁵ James.M.Theobald-Russell. August 1960. An Analysis of the English Poor Law Amendment Act of 1834. [HTTPS://core.ac.uk/download/pdf/46925819.pdf](https://core.ac.uk/download/pdf/46925819.pdf).

Chapter III: The Significance of Governmental Relief System

increase of the flow of commerce.²⁶ The separation and classification of the poor inside the workhouse proved to be ineffective. The sick or those suffering from various diseases were completely excluded from any kind of provision. Expectant mothers, infants, vagrants who use to spend only one night inside the workhouse suffered from the same situation.²⁷

Conclusion

As a final analysis, the Poor Law commissioners and their efforts to change the living conditions of the poor failed except for the workhouse test. The plans made by the Poor Law Commissioners did not work or fulfill their expectations until 1847 when they decided to step down.²⁸ At that time there was a general agreement among historians that the great advancement and achievement in the field of Poor relief started from 1847. However; a general question can be raised as to what extent one can attribute the success or failure of such a social problem to the passing of the Poor Law Amendment Act of 1834? For sure we cannot consider the work of the Elizabethan Act in 1601, the Speenhamland Act in 1795, and its abolishment in 1834 as failures since they are all part of the nation's efforts to change and improve the living conditions of its Poor and lower classes.²⁹

²⁶ Ibid.

²⁷ Ibid

²⁸ Ibid

²⁹ Ibid.

General Conclusion

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The question of whether the Poor Laws system in Britain can be considered as beneficial reforms measures or not, cannot be easily answered. However; if we take the attitudes and philosophical concepts as well as the appreciation of a series of overlapping interests into consideration the answer of this question can be easily found. There was a huge disagreement among contemporary writers and historians concerning the question of Poor Law in Britain, but at the end they have arrived at contradictory opinions or conclusions. On one hand the Poor Laws were praised as an admirable piece of work while on the other hand, blamed and condemned for uncertain reasons. The main reason behind the New Poor Law design was to avoid the process of making expensive intrusive and unreliable investigations of the living conditions and the background of the Poor.

The social insurance schemes considered some specific elements such as the organization of work, methods of saving and changes in the family as the basic conditions of an individual's economic status that can be documented at relatively low cost. The creation of the New Poor Law and its demise had a great impact on both the English society and economy. The Old Poor Law did not provide enough information related to the social and economic condition of the poor which led to the rise of a huge gap and difference in wealth and levels of pauperism. This gap made the Old Poor Law ineffective and impractical to administer or to be applied.

The majority of historians agreed that the great achievements and advancements in the field of poor relief started from 1847. However; the main question that should be asked is to what extent one can attribute the success or failure of such a social problem to the passing of the Poor Law Amendment Act of 1834? The growing number of charities organisations was the

General Conclusion

main reason behind the huge efforts in order to reduce outdoor relief in the late 19th century. These charities organisations focused more helping the “deserving poor” leaving the undeserving poor to be helped by the Poor Law Authorities.

This work system brought the desired result and had a positive impact on the English society. The number of those used to receive outdoor relief had reduced significantly by 1900. Despite of the fact that, the workhouse population had risen, the number or the proportion of the poor in the total population had declined from 4.7% in the 1860s to around 2.5% in 1900. In general it can be said that the Poor Law Amendment Act of 1834 was not considered as successful relief system due to many reasons. The principles of this Act were not fully implemented: the outdoor relief was not abolished; the workhouse-test was enforced notion wide, the principle of less-eligibility did not work. And the aim to cut the cost of Poor relief (indoor and outdoor) was not achieved.

The majority of the working class saw the Poor Law Amendment Act of 1834 as a tool used by the state in order to punish those who were poor, even if it was not their mistake. The Act focused only on the effects or the outcomes of poverty, neglecting the causes of it. Nevertheless, the Poor Law Amendment Act of 1834 was seen by historian as the most significant development in the history of poverty and welfare in the 19th century and that it set the agenda for the debate on poverty for the next century.

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