

# Development of the Welfare State and NHS in the UK

# Historical Position



In Victorian Britain it had been common to lay the blame for poverty and unemployment upon the 'idleness' of the individuals concerned.

At that time a wide variety of charitable and philanthropic organisations existed, and it was not felt that the state needed to provide a comprehensive system of welfare support.

(The National Archive 2019)

# Sir William Beveridge (1879 – 1963)

Beveridge was a British economist and social reformer, closely associated with the development of the Welfare State.

He trained as a lawyer but came to prominence during the Liberal government of 1906 – 1914 when he was asked to advise David Lloyd George on old age pensions and national insurance.

(BBC 2014)



# Sir William Beveridge (1879 – 1963)



In 1941, the government commissioned a report into the ways that Britain should be rebuilt after World War Two.



Beveridge was an obvious choice to take charge.



Beveridge published his report in 1942 and recommended that the government should find ways of fighting the five ['Giant Evils' of 'Want, Disease, Ignorance, Squalor and Idleness'](#). (Click on this link to watch a short film).

(BBC 2014)

# BEVERIDGE'S FIVE GIANT EVILS



Idleness (unemployment)



Squalor (poor housing)



Want (poverty)



Disease (lack of health care)



Ignorance (lack of education)

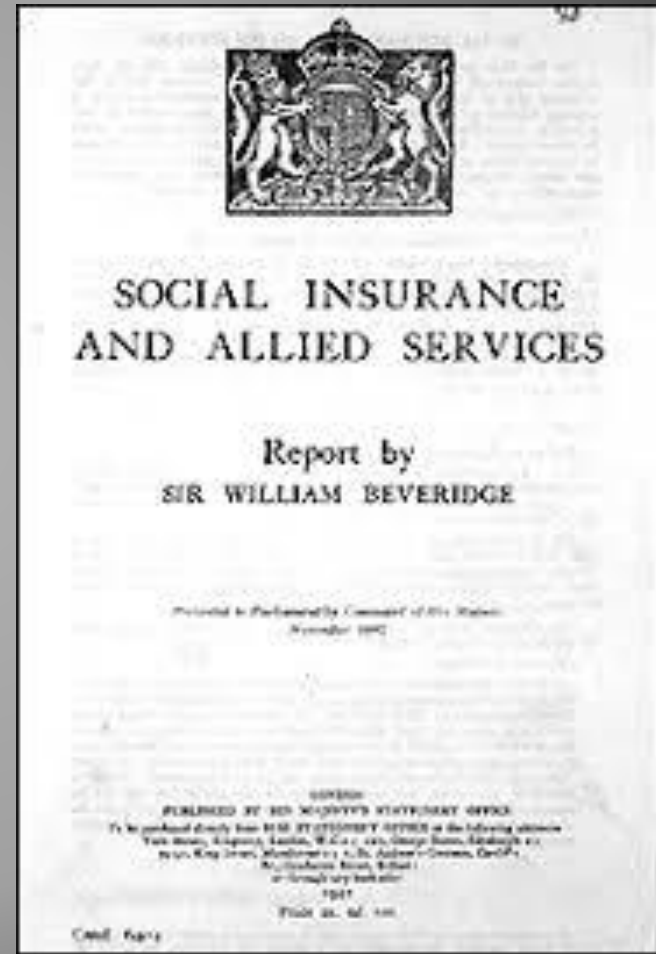
# The Beveridge Report

On 1 December 1942 the wartime coalition government published a report entitled 'Social Insurance and Allied Services'.

It had been written by Sir William Beveridge, a highly regarded economist and expert on unemployment problems.

The Beveridge Report quickly became the blueprint for the modern British Welfare State.

(The National Archive 2019)



# The Beveridge Report



The Beveridge Report proposed that all working people should pay a weekly contribution to the state.



In return, benefits would be paid to the unemployed, the sick, the retired and the widowed.



Beveridge wanted to ensure that there was an acceptable minimum standard of living in Britain below which nobody fell.

(The National Archive 2019)

# Introduction of the Welfare State



The new Prime Minister, Clement Attlee, announced he would introduce the Welfare State outlined in the 1942 Beveridge Report.



This included the establishment of a National Health Service in 1948 with free medical treatment for all.



A national system of benefits was also introduced to provide 'social security' so that the population would be protected from the 'cradle to the grave'. (BBC 2014)

# The Welfare State



The principle of state intervention was established more firmly during the period between 1914 and 1945.

During the Second World War, for example, the government introduced free school meals and milk.

In addition to the Beveridge Report, it also sponsored (in 1944) a white paper on education, strategies for achieving full employment, and the creation of a national health service. (The National Archive 2019)

# The Welfare State



These changing attitudes to social policy in wartime Britain were reflected in the series of reforms introduced by the post-war Labour government under Clement Attlee (1945–51). The National Insurance Act (1946), for example, created a comprehensive system of unemployment, sickness, maternity and pension benefits funded by employers, employees and the government.

(The National Archive 2019)

# The Welfare State



Most famously of all, the National Health Service (NHS) Act 1946 instituted for the first time in Britain a universal state health service.

The Act, which came into force in July 1948, provided free diagnosis and treatment of illnesses at home or in hospital, including dental and ophthalmic treatment.

(The National Archive 2019)

# The Welfare State



Represented an ideal in which everyone would be able to receive services as a right – offered some degree of security and equity for its citizens.

In contrast the Poor Law 1598 –1601 required each parish to look after its own poor – confined support to those who were destitute.

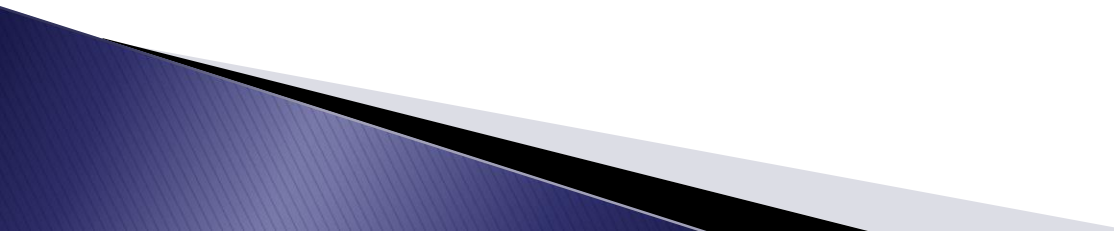
# Social Citizenship

Despite the rising costs of the NHS, the post-war reforms of the Labour government established a domestic political consensus that lasted for nearly 30 years.

The sociologist T. H. Marshall wrote in 1965, 'it is generally agreed that... the overall responsibility for the welfare of the citizens must remain with the state'.

Marshall's own concept of 'social citizenship' – a new model of citizenship based on economic and social (as well as political) rights – was characteristic of this collective approach to social welfare after 1945.

(The National Archive 2019)



# Rolling back the State

The 'social citizenship' model was not really challenged until the emergence of Margaret Thatcher as Conservative Party leader (1975) and then Prime Minister (1979).

Thatcherism promised low taxes, less state intervention, and lower levels of public spending. This involved, in theory at least, substantial cuts in welfare spending.

The succession of Thatcher governments between 1979 and 1990 became synonymous with the idea of 'rolling back the state'.

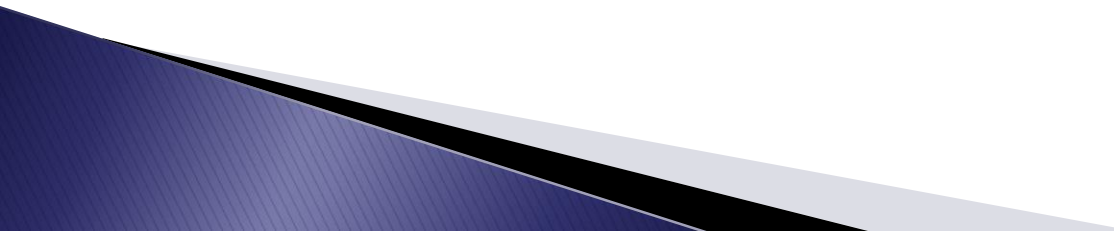


# The Thatcher Years

Despite cuts in spending on housing and stricter eligibility rules for benefits, however, the Thatcher revolution was less radical than either its opponents or its supporters claimed.

Welfare spending in fact, remained stationary between the late 1970s and the late 1980s.

Nevertheless, the Thatcher years eroded the political consensus in favour of the Welfare State. (The National Archive 2019)

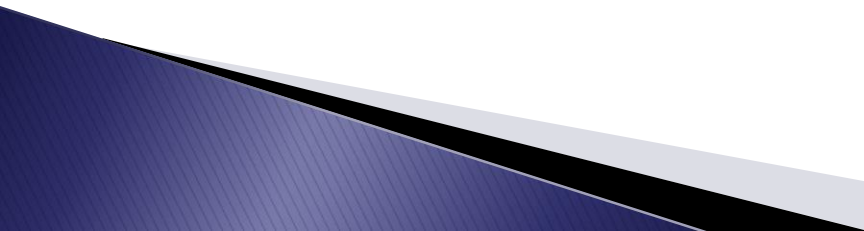


# The Welfare State Today

Today, in early-21st-century Britain, the debate on welfare spending and social policy is no longer centred on Beveridge's 'cradle to grave' principle.

It is far more concerned with providing cost-effective social care, through a mixture of public and private initiatives.

(The National Archive 2019)



# References

British Broadcasting Corporation (BBC) (2014) *History: historic Figures: William Beveridge (1879 –1963)*. Available at:

[http://www.bbc.co.uk/history/historic\\_figures/beveridge\\_william.shtml](http://www.bbc.co.uk/history/historic_figures/beveridge_william.shtml) Date Accessed 8<sup>th</sup> September 2019.

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