

# The welfare state

Society



The role and significance of the Beveridge Report in establishing the Welfare State in Britain. The purpose of this essay is to look at the long history of the Welfare State in Britain and the evolving social, economic and political changes in society today, as well as the birth of the Welfare State after the Second World War which was the turning point (watershed) in British History.

The freshly appointed Labour government by then took on the job of setting up a 'welfare state' that would systematically deal with the 'five giant evils' proposed by William Beveridge in a report, which later became known as the Beveridge report. The British welfare state, if it is to be defined, it is generally incorporated with Sir William Beveridge and the after war period.

Welfare State is the concept in which government plays a key role in protecting and promoting the economic and social well-being of its citizens, based on the principles of equal opportunity in the distribution of wealth and public responsibility for those who lack the minimal provisions for a good life, for example good health, education and basic income (Abercrombie and Warde 2000). Is it the responsibility of a government to provide for its citizen, what about the cost, because it can lead to ever-increasing public spending that the government may find difficult to sustain.

According to Abercrombie and Warde (2000) the term 'welfare state' was invented, following the Second World War when Social policy was developing. During the Second World War, the coalition government headed by Winston Churchill, the conservative party torch bearer deliberately planned the creation of a better Britain than the one in which many people have lived in the poverty-stricken 1930s.

Plans were drafted and policies were generated which were to ensure that, in peacetime, there would be a family support system, good health care for all, more jobs will be made available as well as creating new towns and adequate housing (Walsh et al, 2000). However, in 1941, during the Second World War, Sir William Beveridge was given a task by Winston Churchill (wartime prime minister of the coalition government) to head an interdepartmental committee of civil servants in an investigation and evaluate the national insurance policies as well as suggestions of ways to improve them (Addison, 2005). But, according to Walsh et al (2000) Beveridge went further than the original terms of references given him. In the final statement known as the 'Beveridge report' ( ), it was introduced by its architect, Sir William Beveridge, to the British parliament in 1942. Throughout this report, Beveridge kept mentioning the abolition of 'want' which was believed to be the major problem at the time.

He predicted major reforms in health, housing, and education; because the policies needed to attack the five giant evils were set out in detail in his report. The five giant evils were want, disease, ignorance, idleness and squalor by which he meant poverty, unemployment, poor housing and lack of access to decent education and health care. This report was radical and became popular partly because of its promise of social security for all, and partly because it brings to mind the vision of the peacetime life promised by Winston Churchill at that time for which millions were longing (Abercrombie and Warde 2000).

Winston Churchill was not happy because the Beveridge report brought up issues which distracted people's attention from the Second World War as

well as threatening to produce controversy between the coalition governments. He also disapproved of the Beveridge report on the ground that no government could commit in advance the expenditure involved, thus, confusions between the Conservative and the Labour members and this affected his election campaign during the post war (Addison, 2005).

William Beveridge recommendations based on social survey, were designed to tackle poverty primarily through the development of a national social security system, providing income security ' from the cradle to the grave'( life -long) that will for the first time allowed the British people to have real income security that would be available to everyone regardless of means testing.

As much as the ' five giant' differs from each other, there is a connection between the five of them, for example, unemployment in society causes people to lack financially and this can lead to lack of good medical care, want, poor housing and etc. The Five giant evils; Want, essentially this refers to poverty or lack, during the post war a lot of the British people were in need, they had no basic financial support and health care to keep them alive as well as keeping them above the poverty line by which income does not cover necessities.

Due to lack of financial support people could not afford education and this resulted in lack of knowledge which is referred to as Ignorance, this was due to poor education. To make matter worst there was no national health care because, this had to be paid for, but there was no money and medical care was not free and this led to the outbreak of many diseases such as cholera, this was also linked to want, no money no medical care.

Nevertheless, there were hospitals and only the rich in society could afford medical treatment, however, today the welfare state had made medical treatment available for all regardless of employment status. People were living in slums because there was poor housing and this was referred to as squalors, there is no difference today even though the welfare state has made provision for housing and some of these houses have been turned into slums by their occupant.

Occupant of these houses don't care to keep these houses clean because it cost them nothing, this giant is called Squalor, it is still with us today. The last giant was referred to as Idleness, this was due to the hangover from depressions from the time of unemployment, today some people have chosen to stay idle, because the state will feed and house them. As much as the welfare state is good, the Victorian 'workhouses' would have been helpful in dealing with idleness in society, because one would need to work at the workhouse in order to get help from the state.

The Beveridge report was an important document because it set out detailed policies for the attack needed to destroy the five giant evils, though the five giant evils were not destroyed completely, however, the Beveridge report left a legacy, the NHS and now there is nothing like absolute poverty in Britain as compare to the years before the Second World War when people use to actually sleep in slum, therefore the Beveridge report was a blueprint on which the welfare state was emerged because it helped shape Britain's social policies. (Naidoo and Wills, 2008). The publication of the Beveridge report was a great success.

Majority of the British public welcomed the report's finding and wished to see them implemented as quickly as possible according to an opinion poll (national archives, 2003). This shows the extent to which the population had shifted to the left wing (representing the Labour party) during the course of the Second World War. The post war election, in June 1945 resulted in a landslide victory for the Labour Party led by Clement Attlee , who promised in their election campaign that they will tackle Beveridge's five giant evils and established ' New Jerusalem' which was reluctantly rejected by Winston Churchill.

To implement the Beveridge's report, the Labour party attacked the ' five giant evil' by passing legislations, though they were not completely destroyed, however, one of the giant called disease, the most famous tackled by the Labour government left the state with a legacy, the 1946 National Health Service Act which meant free accessible health care system for all beginning in 1948, though it was hugely expensive. In 1946 the national insurance act was passed to tackled the giant called ' want' making provisions for the unemployed and pregnant women, pension for the retired and etc.

The education Act 1944, a conservative idea to tackle ' ignorance' so education was made free, the school leaving age was moved to 16 years previously 15. In 1947 Labour passed the education act into law. In 1948 the employment and training act was passed to tackle both ' ignorance' and ' idleness' making provision for school leavers , demobbed service men to train and established a skilled workforce. In addition, council house buildings and full employment was made possible by a better economy after the war.

The five giants were tackled, but were not destroyed, because poverty has always lived with society.

Comparably, there is nothing like absolute poverty in Britain today unlike before the welfare state when people had to make their homes in slums. Welfare states vary temporally as well as geographically. Like time welfare states do not stand still. Their evolution depends on choices made within restrictions (Powell, 1999). According to Marx (1999) welfare states make their own histories, but not within circumstances of their own choosing (cited in Powell, 1999). Today, the recommendations and policies that were detailed in the Beveridge report to tackle poverty primarily through the development of a national social security system are still considered to provide the foundation of the modern welfare state.