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Revisiting the Welfare State

ROBERT M. PAGE



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Series editor's foreword

Welcome to the eighth volume in the Introducing Social Policy series. The series itself is designed to provide a range of well informed texts on a variety of topics that fall within the ambit of social policy studies.

Although primarily designed with undergraduate social policy students in mind, it is hoped that the series – and individual titles within it – will have a wider appeal to students in other social science disciplines and to those engaged on professional and post-qualifying courses in health care and social welfare.

The aim throughout the planning of the series has been to produce a series of texts that both reflect and contribute to contemporary thinking and scholarship, and which present their discussion in a readable and easily accessible format.

The fifth of July 2008 marks the 60th anniversary of the implementation of the National Health Service and the schemes of National Insurance and Assistance designed to provide 'cradle to grave' financial security to the British population. It was described by Clement Attlee, the then Labour Prime Minister as 'a day which makes history'. In the context of post-war austerity that was no exaggerated boast: for, along with the 1944 Education Act, Town and Country Planning legislation and a commitment to full employment, it was the culmination of Britain's 'classic' welfare state, a New Deal for the British people, a transformation from warfare to welfare. The intervening sixty years have seen the growing importance of welfare issues in domestic politics, as well as a transformation in the supply of welfare services. If the transition in the 1940s was from warfare to welfare, the first decade of the twenty-first century has witnessed another New Deal: from welfare to workfare.

This is but the outline of the welfare story which Robert Page tells so graphically in this book. Drawing on a wide range of sources, he not only

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x Series editor's foreword

provides a well-informed narrative of welfare state change, but also of the dynamics of 'the five giants': the core services that provide the political commitment to welfare. Furthermore, he acts as an informed and stimulating guide to some of the central debates in the history of Britain's welfare experience over the past sixty years: the role of the Second World War in the creation of a more generous and fairer society; the alleged consensus between Conservative and Labour parties in government in the years between 1951 and 1979; and the continuities between the radical Conservatism of Thatcher and Major and their New Labour successors in office. Market practices, consumerism and diversity may, as Page tantalizingly suggests, betoken an emerging cross-party concordat on welfare, present and future. But to those of us who have lived through this period, they also suggest a significant shift away from the transformative vision of Attlee's Appointed Day.

What better time, then, to revisit Britain's Welfare State.

David Gladstone
University of Bristol

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I owe an immense debt to Jane Wilton who might have had second thoughts about accepting a proposal of marriage if she knew it was likely to involve reading successive draft chapters of a social policy text in her 'spare' time. Her fine eye for detail, and her constructive and perceptive suggestions for improving this book have been invaluable.

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List of abbreviations

ABCA	Army Bureau of Current Affairs
ALMO	arm's length management organization
ARP	Air Raid Precautions service
BBC	British Broadcasting Corporation
BMA	British Medical Association
CPC	Conservative Political Centre
CSJ	Commission on Social Justice
DfEE	Department for Education and Employment
GCSE	General Certificate of Secondary Education
GM	grant-maintained
GPs	General Practitioners
HMI	Her Majesty's Inspectorate
IEA	Institute of Economic Affairs
IMF	International Monetary Fund
LEA	local education authority
LLP	London Labour Party
LMS	local management of schools
MUD	moral underclass discourse
NALT	National Association of Labour Teachers
NHS	National Health Service
NICE	National Institute for Clinical Excellence
OFSTED	Office for Standards in Education
ONG	One Nation Group
PEP	Political and Economic Planning
QUANGO	QUasi-Autonomous Non-Governmental Organization
RED	redistributionist discourse
SB	Supplementary Benefit
SERPS	State earnings-related pension scheme
SID	social integrationist discourse
VAT	Value Added Tax

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Introduction

The development of the British welfare state has been the subject of a number of scholarly publications. The pioneering work of Maurice Bruce (1961), Bentley Gilbert (1970) and Derek Fraser (1973) has been complemented by texts devoted to the period before the Second World War such as J.D. Hay (1983), and Bernard Harris (2004), as well as others that focus on developments since 1945 (Sullivan 1992; Hill 1993; Deakin 1994; Gladstone 1999; Timmins 2001; Lowe 2005; Glennerster 2007).

Although it is widely acknowledged that the study of social policy can be enriched by an appreciation of its historical and political contexts, there remains a sense in which such material is more often regarded as a preparation for the study of contemporary social policy, rather than an integral part of the subject itself. As Gladstone (2003) notes, 'those who study social policy are often more concerned with the present and the future than with the past' (p. 25). One of the reasons why there are likely to be differing opinions over the centrality or otherwise of political history for the study of welfare is that the discipline of social policy itself has a more 'porous' identity than many allied subjects, such as sociology or economics. The fact that a number of university departments of social policy have been established (and disestablished) over the past 40 years or so, and that a membership organization (the Social Policy Association) has been functioning since 1967 has done little to solidify the key constituent components of the subject or its boundaries. There are those, for example, who contend that the subject should, in keeping with its previous incarnation as social administration (see Mishra 1977), remain 'problem' focused with an emphasis on empirical investigation that can give rise to policy initiatives that 'improve' the functioning of society and human well being. Others, in contrast, believe that the study of social policy should use the insights derived from neighbouring subjects to develop more 'sophisticated' theoretical perspectives

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2 Revisiting the Welfare State

concerning the role and purpose of social policy in modern societies. In many ways it could be argued that a key strength of the academic study of social policy is that it defies easy classification. Diversity of this kind can, though, make it more difficult to build up collective strength and purpose.

This book starts from the premise that the student of social policy can gain a deeper understanding of the welfare state by studying political and historical accounts of the welfare state, party manifestos and policy documents, and political memoirs. It can be argued that a focus of this kind gives undue prominence to the influence of parties and key actors. Our understanding of social policy will, however, be much the poorer if these aspects of social policy are downplayed or ignored.

A number of key historical and political issues relating to the development of the British welfare state since 1940 are examined in this volume. The intention is not to challenge or disprove previous theories or explanations, but rather to engage with them. It is hoped that there will be many other such reappraisals of the post-1940 welfare state.

Each of the five main chapters in the book is devoted to particular themes associated with the British welfare state since 1940. Chapter One revisits the issue of the impact of the Second World War on civilian behaviour and attitudes. Did the war act as a catalyst for major economic and social change? Did a consensus emerge between Conservative and Labour members of Churchill's coalition wartime government between 1940 and 1945 about the welfare state? In terms of the first of these themes, evidence of the 'progressive' impact of war, such as increased selflessness, the permeation of a 'never again' attitude amongst the public, the media, the Church and in official publications, such as the Beveridge Report is examined. Positive information of this kind is contrasted with examples of disunity on the Home Front, such as crime, the harsh treatment of aliens, anti-Semitism, strikes, absenteeism and unequal civilian 'sacrifices'. On balance, it is concluded that the 'Titmuss thesis', which suggests that the war had a 'progressive' impact on the conduct and attitudes of the British public, remains persuasive. The suggestion that a welfare consensus emerged between Conservative and Labour members of the coalition government seems harder to substantiate. Although agreement was reached in a number of policy areas, there remained, as the 1945 General Election campaign confirmed, fundamental and irreconcilable differences between the two main parties over the role and purpose of the welfare state.

The democratic socialist welfare strategy of the post-war Attlee governments from 1945 to 1951 is revisited in Chapter Two. Despite adverse economic circumstances, the Labour Party set about creating a welfare state that would bring a greater level of security and enhanced opportunities for all citizens. The various strengths and weaknesses of Labour's initiatives in the areas of social security, health, education and housing are reviewed. Given the austere climate in which Labour was operating it is not surprising

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to find that Labour's welfare initiatives fell short of the highest democratic socialist standards. They did, however, represent a significant step forward. Crucially, Labour's welfare policies formed part of a wider desire to create a socialist commonwealth. This broader goal proved more problematic as Labour was uncertain about what type of economy it wanted to create and what other institutional changes would be necessary to bring about a socialist society. The social conservatism of the Party leadership is highlighted as problematic in this regard. Moreover, it is suggested that Labour may have over-estimated the public's appetite for socialism. The 'fair shares' ethos that emerged during the war did not necessarily carry over into peacetime. By the time Labour left office in 1951 there were conflicting views within the Party about the way ahead.

Chapter Three revisits the thorny issue of whether a welfare consensus developed between Labour and the Conservatives in the period from 1951 and 1979. Adopting Pimlott's (1988) thesis that a consensus requires an ideological agreement, the respective approaches of the two parties towards the welfare state are considered. It is argued that the Conservatives adopted a more favourable approach towards the welfare state during the period from 1945 to 1964 when modern conservatism was in the ascendancy. The One Nation Group, which had been established in 1950, was instrumental in developing a more positive accord with the welfare state which did not pose a threat to traditional Conservative values such as 'sound' money, low taxation, self-reliance and the voluntary ethic. Importantly, this new thinking did not signal an ideological conversion to Labour's egalitarian strategy. Instead, a distinctive Conservative approach to the welfare state with an emphasis on minimum standards and greater selectivity was set down.

After a period of consolidation, Labour turned to a revisionist form of democratic socialism, based on many of the ideas put forward in Anthony Crosland's (1956) seminal text *The Future of Socialism*. Labour remained committed to the establishment of a more equal society but now believed that extensive nationalization was not required to ensure that 'modern' capitalism operated in ways that maximized the public interest. Moreover, the welfare state came to be seen as a more appropriate mechanism for bringing about an egalitarian society than further measures of income redistribution. Labour's insistence that its welfare strategy was dependent on sustained economic growth proved problematic. In an era of economic turbulence and low growth it was difficult to make any sustained progress in social policy. Indeed, by the late 1960s and 1970s it was even being suggested that the welfare state might be having a negative, rather than positive, effect on the economy and the wider society.

Although there were points of similarity between the Conservatives and Labour in relation to social policy in the period from 1951 to 1979, it is concluded that it is difficult to sustain the proposition that a welfare

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consensus emerged during this period. Significant ideological differences between the parties over the welfare state remained.

The Conservative welfare 'revolution' that was said to have occurred between 1979 and 1997 is revisited in Chapter Four. Consecutive defeats in the General Elections of 1974 led to growing interest in neo-liberal ideas within the Party. These ideas came to the fore following the election of Margaret Thatcher as the party's leader in 1975. Returning to government on a neo-liberal platform in 1979, Thatcher sought to reverse Britain's reputation as the 'sick man of Europe' by curbing inflation, lowering taxes, controlling the trade unions, reducing public expenditure and creating a more entrepreneurial ethos in society. Although the economic and social costs of what could be described as 'confrontational' Conservatism were high, Thatcher succeeded in achieving many of her objectives. It is questionable, though, whether Thatcher presided over a welfare revolution. While Thatcher and many of her leading cabinet ministers were committed in principle to rolling back the welfare state, the political and economic costs of such a revolutionary strategy were judged too high. Accordingly, radical reform of the welfare state, rather than revolution, became the order of the day.

Although John Major distanced himself from some of the more unpopular policies of his predecessor such as the Poll Tax and was more sympathetic to the ideals of a welfare state, he did not change direction to any substantial extent. Consolidation proved to be his watchword. The final part of this chapter is devoted to an assessment of whether Thatcher and Major were welfare 'revolutionaries'.

It could be argued that it is premature to 'revisit' New Labour when they are still in office. However, the fact that they have had such a dramatic effect on the political landscape since abandoning their Party's traditional revisionist democratic socialist approach to welfare, provides a strong reason for reviewing their approach in Chapter Five of this volume. Unlike previous post-1945 Labour governments, New Labour has adopted a much more favourable approach towards the market, and has been less concerned about rising income and wealth inequalities, which they believe have irreversible 'global', rather than 'national' causes. New Labour has pursued what they have termed a 'third way' or 'modern social democratic' approach towards the welfare state and society. They believe that a modern welfare state must be pro-active, rather than passive, encourage a diverse range of providers, be 'customer' orientated, and extend opportunities to all. Following an examination of key elements of the welfare strategy of the Blair administrations, it is concluded that New Labour has striven to put its principles into effect, albeit with varying levels of success. It is acknowledged that New Labour's perception of a 'progressive' welfare policy will not find favour with traditional Labour supporters who believe that the party has abandoned its commitment to equality, universalism and public provision of services. The

chapter concludes by suggesting that New Labour's accommodation with some of the tenets of traditional Conservatism, coupled with David Cameron's professed desire to tackle relative poverty and increase opportunities for the most disadvantaged, may finally give rise to the first ideological welfare consensus.

Further reading

There are some excellent accounts of the development of the British welfare state since the Second World War. Few would dispute that the texts by Timmins (2001), Lowe (2005) and Glennerster (2007) deserve a place on the bookshelf of anyone interested in the contemporary history of the welfare state.

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chapter

one

The impact of war on the 'Home' Front, the coalition government and the Welfare State

This chapter will examine two central issues relating to the impact of the Second World War on British society. First, attention will be focused on the question of whether the experience of war on the Home Front led to more 'progressive' social attitudes and a greater appetite for egalitarian forms of state intervention. Secondly, the approach to social policy adopted by Churchill's coalition government will be examined. Did Conservative and Labour members of the wartime coalition share a common understanding of the role and purpose of state intervention that could be described as a consensus, or was this merely a wartime accord that could not be sustained in the immediate post-war period?

The impact of the Second World War on social attitudes

After being out of power since 1931, the Labour Party recognized that 'total war' would provide a unique opportunity to convince the British people that Labour's interventionist approach to economic and social issues could lead to significant improvements in well-being. At the Party's Annual Conference in 1940, Attlee told the assembled delegates that 'the world that must emerge from this war must be a world attuned to our ideals' (quoted in Brooke 1992: 1). Labour's dramatic victory in the 1945 General Election suggests that nearly half of the adult population had indeed been persuaded that a Labour government would better serve their interests than a return to Conservative rule. To what extent then can it be said that wartime experiences were responsible for this change in Party allegiance? In one of the official wartime histories, Richard Titmuss (1950) came to the firm conclusion that the prospect of invasion, coupled with the impact and consequences of enemy bombing raids led to an upsurge in community

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spirit, less pronounced class distinctions and a desire for a more egalitarian society:

The mood of the people changed, and in sympathetic response, values changed as well. If dangers were to be shared, then resources should also be shared . . . dramatic events on the home front served to reinforce the war-warmed impulse of people for a more generous society.

(Titmuss 1950: 508)

Of course, it is difficult to arrive at a definitive conclusion concerning the way in which wartime experiences gave rise to public demands for economic and social change. However, there are a number of factors that appear to support what could be described as the 'progressive impact of war' thesis.

Increased selflessness

Many of those involved in the war on the Home Front have commented on the friendliness and camaraderie they experienced during the war. Gioya Steinke, a welfare adviser with the London County Council Rest Centre Service, recalls telling a 'perfect stranger' how she longed for a bath. The stranger 'handed me her keys, told me her address and said, "Go to the house tomorrow and have a bath and leave the keys under the mat. She said that if I could take my own soap and towel, she'd be pleased but if I couldn't, that was all right" ' (quoted in Levine 2006: 349).

According to Titmuss (1950), the government's voluntary evacuation scheme also demonstrated the selfless sentiments of the British public:

For the authorities to impose – and to maintain for almost five years – a policy of billeting in private homes was a severe test of the better side of human nature. It was a formidable – to some an intolerable – burden for any government to place on a section of its people. A community less kindly, less self-controlled, less essentially Christian in behaviour, would not have acquiesced to the same extent and for such a long period of time as this one did.

(p. 388)

The government's evacuation scheme alerted those in the countryside to the deprivation of large numbers of poverty stricken inner city children. Significant numbers of evacuee children arrived in shoddy clothing and 'shoes with cardboard soles' (Calder 1971: 44). Many were found to be suffering from head lice, scabies and other skin diseases. Standards of cleanliness amongst the evacuee children also proved to be a source of concern. Many children had come from overcrowded homes that lacked a bath or separate WC. In the face of such widespread deprivation many householders may have had cause to reflect on the broader structural causes of such

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deprivation. Equally, though, others might have been more inclined to look to individualistic explanations to explain the poor condition of the evacuees. As McNicol (1986) notes:

When considering the long-term effects of the social debate on evacuation . . . we must recognise that, as well as helping to construct an ideological climate favourable to welfare legislation, it also boosted a conservative, behaviouristic analysis of poverty that viewed the root cause of the children's condition as family failure, poor parenting and general social inadequacy.

(p. 24)

Citizens on the Home Front displayed selflessness in many other ways. There was a positive response to the appeal made to workers in May 1940 by the Minister of Supply, Herbert Morrison, to 'Go to it'. 'Many factories went over to seven-day working. Shifts of ten or twelve hours became routine in whole sectors of war industry. And, it should be noted, this was achieved without the Government needing to resort to coercive measures' (Mackay 2002: 61). In addition, there was an upsurge in voluntary activity, notably with the Air Raid Precautions service (ARP). According to Mackay:

the phenomenon of unpaid volunteering throughout the six years of the war was one of its characteristic features and surely one of the most striking indicators of the robust state of civilian morale. Of the one and a half million civilians who made up ARP's 'fourth arm' of wardens, firefighters, rescue workers, ambulance drivers, medical staff, telephonists and messengers, no fewer than four-fifths were unpaid volunteers.

(p. 132)

There were also countless daily examples of the 'Dunkirk' spirit. For example, Titmuss (1950) relates how workers on their way to Victoria Station, upon encountering Charity Service Organization staff struggling to deal with a consignment of food, blankets and clothing from the Canadian Red Cross in Blitz-torn London, immediately offered to help. 'The sight of Red Cross labels and the emotional stimulus of bombing broke down traditional dignities and liberated a spirit of helpfulness' (p. 262).

A 'never again' ethos

There is much evidence to suggest that the experience of war contributed to the creation of a 'never again' ethos amongst the British public. As Hennessy (1993) contends, this phrase 'captures the motivating impulse of the first half-dozen years after the war – never again would there be war; never again would the British people be housed in slums, living off a meagre diet thanks

to low wages or no wages at all; never again would mass unemployment blight the lives of millions; never again would natural abilities remain dormant in the absence of educational stimulus' (p. 2).

A number of surveys and studies conducted by the polling organization Gallup, the Home Intelligence Division of the Ministry of Information (McLaine 1979) and Mass Observation (which had been established in 1936 by Charles Madge, Tom Harrison and Humphrey Jennings to gather information on public attitudes and behaviour – Harrison 1978) confirmed the emergence of a 'never again' ethos. According to a Home Intelligence Division report of 1942, for example, there was substantial civilian support for a new society characterized by full employment, better employee rights, a more equal distribution of income and educational reform (Mackay 2002: 230).

Wartime experiences also appeared to be 'radicalizing' those serving in the armed forces. Interestingly, the Army Bureau of Current Affairs (ABCA), established in 1941 to counteract boredom amongst service personnel, was seen as contributing to this attitudinal shift by providing coverage of political issues. An ABCA publication summarizing the Beveridge Report in 1942 led one outraged Conservative MP, Maurice Petherick, to write to Churchill's Parliamentary Private Secretary, Harvie-Watt, urging him to curb the activities of the Bureau. According to Petherick, a failure to act would lead to 'the creatures coming back all pansy-pink' (Addison 1992: 355). While the precise impact of ABCA activity is open to question (see Summerfield 1981), it did appear to engender a greater degree of critical awareness about social issues amongst the Forces. Indeed, when a mock General Election was held in one of the 'Forces Parliaments' in Cairo in 1944, there was overwhelming support for the Labour Party (which attracted 119 votes), rather than the Conservatives, who polled just 17 votes (Mason and Thompson 1991: 57).

Voices for change

The case for social change was taken up by the media, film makers, the Church and, most famously in the Beveridge Report itself. Although both Churchill and the Ministry of Information were reluctant to enter into any debate concerning non-military 'war aims', they found it difficult to quell interest in this subject. A famous editorial written by E. H. Carr in *The Times*, for example, made a clarion call for the transformation of society:

If we speak of democracy we do not mean a democracy which maintains the right to vote but forgets the right to work and the right to live. If we speak of freedom we do not mean a rugged individualism which excludes social organization and economic planning. If we speak of

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equality we do not mean a political equality nullified by social and economic privilege.

(Carr, *The Times*, 1 July 1940)

Reconstruction was a major theme in the high circulation weekly magazine, *Picture Post*, which had become renowned as a 'popularizer of the views of intellectuals and progressive politicians' (Addison 1977: 152). In the edition of 4 January 1941, entitled *A Plan for Britain*, authors such as Thomas Balogh, A.D.K. Owen, Maxwell Fry, A.D. Lindsay, Julian Huxley and J.B. Priestley set out some of the political and social changes they deemed necessary in the areas of employment, social security, planning, education, health care and leisure. As the foreword to this edition made clear, 'Our plan for a new Britain is not something outside the war or something *after* the war. It is an essential part of our war aims. It is indeed, our most positive war aim. The new Britain is the country we are fighting for' (*Picture Post*, 10(1), 4 January 1941: 4). Not surprisingly, the sale of left-wing publications soared in this period. According to Addison (1977), by the end of the war nearly half of the national newspaper market had been captured by left-wing dailies compared with just 30% in 1930.

The British Broadcasting Corporation (BBC) caught the mood for change. In a number of radio 'postscripts' broadcast on Sunday evenings after the nine o'clock news between June and October 1940, J.B. Priestley gave full expression to 'never again' sympathies (Priestley 1940). Despite becoming 'Britain's first radio personality' with an estimated audience of some 30% of the population (Smith 2000: 47), Priestley nevertheless was, in the words of George Orwell, 'shoved off the air' after complaints from Conservative MPs about his socialist sympathies (Orwell, cited in Davidson 2001: 122; see also Addison 1977: 119). This sparked off 'a spate of newspaper articles and letters to editors, most of which were opposed to what they saw as the muzzling of a popular speaker who was asking questions that needed to be asked' (Mackay 2002: 227).

Film makers also took up the 'never again' theme (Mackay 2002). Three films made by John Baxter between 1941 and 1942, *Love on the Dole*, *The Common Touch* and *Let the People Sing*, highlighted the need for radical change in society. Similar sentiments could also be detected in government sponsored films such as the Boutling brothers' documentary *The Dawn Guard*, which focused on the activities of the Home Guard, as well as those of the legendary Humphrey Jennings (Jackson 2004). In a film entitled *A Diary for Timothy*, a record of the closing stages of the war is made in diary form for a newly born child, Timothy. In the closing sequence of the film, the narrator, Michael Redgrave (a leading actor of the period), asks Timothy whether he is going to allow 'greed for money or power' to oust 'decency from the world as they have in the past' or whether he will endeavour 'to make the world a different place'.

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Other institutions promoted the case for change. Indeed, some such as the Fabian Society had been setting out agendas for change for many years before the war. As Mackay (2002) notes, 'By 1943 there were more than one hundred unofficial organizations studying and putting out ideas and proposals on different aspects of post-war reconstruction: land and town planning, industry and economics, agriculture, housing and public amenities, education, medicine and health' (p. 222).

The Church of England advanced the case for social change as well. A conference was held in Malvern in 1941 to consider the role that the Church could play in the reconstruction of society. In a subsequent letter to *The Times* published in 1942, the Archbishops of Canterbury, York and Westminster, and the Moderator of the Free Church called for an end to gross inequalities and unequal opportunities. The newly enthroned Archbishop of Canterbury, William Temple (who became known as the 'people's archbishop') returned to this theme in his influential Penguin publication, *Christianity and the Social Order*. In this book Temple (1942), a former member of the Labour Party, expanded on many of the themes raised at the Malvern conference, arguing that welfare reforms such as paid holidays and family allowances were fully in line with Anglican teaching (Lewis 1986; Kent 1992).

It was the publication of the Beveridge Report in 1942, however, that seemed to epitomize the 'never again' spirit in British society. Public interest in the report, the contents of which had been trailed in a series of articles and broadcasts in the weeks leading up to its official release (Harris 1997: 416), was confirmed by the forming of large queues at Her Majesty's Stationery Office in the Strand when the Report was published on 1 December. One Mass Observation respondent was overheard to remark:

It's extraordinary the interest people are taking in it. When I went down to the stationery office to get it there were queues of people buying it & I was looking at it on the bus and the conductor said 'I suppose you haven't got a spare copy of that?'

(Quoted in Jefferys 1994: 95)

Over 100,000 copies of the Report were sold within a month of publication and a 'special cheap edition was printed for circulation in the armed services' (Harris 1997: 415). While some more recent commentators such as George (1973) and Kincaid (1975) have questioned the accuracy of Beveridge's suggestion that his proposals for social security were revolutionary (cmd 6404 1942: 6), it is clear that the positive public response to the Report was based on a belief that this publication did indeed signal that the transformation of British society had begun in earnest. It was not the technical rigour of the Report, important though this was to assuage sceptics in Treasury circles and beyond, but rather the 'rich vein of Cromwellian and Bunyanesque prose' that struck a chord with a war weary public (Timmins

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2001: 23). The benign white-haired knight setting forth to tackle the five giants of want, idleness, squalor, disease and ignorance had captured the public mood for a better tomorrow.

The 'never again' spirit was inevitably reflected in the sphere of party politics. As Mason and Thompson (1991) point out, 'All the political parties of the Left enjoyed substantial increases in membership during the war years. Membership of the Labour Party increased significantly from 2,663,000 in 1939 to 3,039,000 in 1945, and at a time when it had lost many members through population movements and conscription to the armed forces' (p. 56).

The absence of a wartime General Election coupled with an electoral truce (under which the mainstream parties in the coalition government agreed not to oppose any by-election candidate standing in a seat that their Party had held prior to the outbreak of war), makes it difficult to assess the strength of public support for social change at this time (Howard 2005). The wartime electoral success of a new, left wing party – Common Wealth – does, however, lend support to the view that public support for Labour would have increased during the war years.

Established in 1942, following the merger of J.B. Priestley's 1941 *Committee* (whose supporters included David Astor, Victor Gollancz, Douglas Jay, François Lafitte and Richard Titmuss) and Sir Richard Acland's *Forward March* movement, Common Wealth pressed the case for the immediate adoption of a socialist war strategy following the fall of Tobruk in North Africa to the German army in 1941 (see Jefferys 1994). Following Allied success at El Alamein a year later, Common Wealth focused more sharply on 'civilian' issues, such as common ownership, enhanced forms of democracy including proportional representation and joint consultation in industry, and a greater morality in political life. Although committed to democratic means, Common Wealth adopted a more radical policy agenda than the Labour Party (Calder 1971).

In seeking to create a 'classless New Jerusalem' (p. 632), Common Wealth proved particularly appealing to the 'Utopian middle class' (Brooke 1992: 69). Certainly, most of its members could be described as middle class and its three hundred or so branches 'tended to be found in the wealthy suburbs rather than the working class areas' (p. 633). Between February 1943 and April 1945 Common Wealth fielded candidates in eight by-elections winning three seats – Eddisbury (April 1943), Skipton (January 1944) and Chelmsford (April 1945). Common Wealth's success in the 'sleepy agricultural backwater' (Calder 1971: 635) of Eddisbury was particular noteworthy given that Labour had previously deemed the constituency unwinnable and, in consequence, had not contested the seat. Common Wealth also supported Charlie White who, having resigned from the Labour Party to stand as an independent Labour candidate, succeeded in defeating Lord Hartington in the infamous Derbyshire West by-election of February 1944 (pp. 637–9).

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Disunity on the Home Front

Although there are numerous examples of the ways in which the war engendered more progressive social attitudes and selfless behaviour on the Home Front, it is important not to overlook contrary evidence. Four forms of anti-social behaviour will be considered, crime, the treatment of aliens and anti-Semitism, strikes and absenteeism and 'unequal' sacrifices.

Crime

Crime increased markedly during the war. Indictable crimes reported to the police in England and Wales had risen by 21% in the 5-year period prior to 1939. Between 1939 and 1945 this rate increased to 57% (Smithies 1982). There was also a sharp rise in juvenile crime during the war that resulted in greater use of corporal punishment. Birching was meted out to 546 offenders in 1941 compared with just 58 in 1939 (Smith 1996: 17).

While some crimes decreased during the war (petrol rationing led to a sharp decline in the number of traffic offences – Calder 1971: 389), others increased sharply not least as a result of wartime regulations. As Gardiner (2004) explains, 'Some crimes were entirely specific to the situation of war: being unable to produce an identity card when required to, entering a restricted zone without a permit, rationing offences, "defeatist talk", absenteeism at work – and of course contravening blackout regulations' (p. 505). In addition, some crimes became 'more reprehensible' and attracted more severe sanctions as a result of wartime conditions. 'Reprehensible' wartime crimes included 'stealing food and goods from the workplace, sabotaging machinery involved in war production, taking advantage of the blackout to mug pedestrians, stealing from bombed-out properties' (p. 505).

There was also a rise in criminal activity amongst normally law-abiding citizens and public officials. The 'ugly phenomenon of looting' (Mackay 2002: 84) provides the most telling illustration of criminal activity of this kind. Following the first air raids in London, cases of looting increased from 539 in September 1940 to 1662 in the following month. As Thomas (2003) points out in *An Underworld at War*, much looting was of a relatively minor nature such as taking 'some tablets of soap from a bomb-damaged factory in Croydon'; absconding with 'two shoes from a damaged lock-up shop'; removing coal from a bombed out church in Holloway or making off with crockery 'from a bombed bungalow in Southend' (p. 81). Although most cases of looting were dealt with by local magistrates, who could impose prison terms of up to 12 months (the previous maximum of 3 months had been extended by an Order of 1940 – Smith 1996), this crime remained a capital offence under the Defence of the Realm Act. Cases remitted to the higher courts tended to attract more severe sentences, particular if they involved those who had abused a position of trust such as police

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officers, ARP wardens, fire fighters or soldiers. In October 1940, an auxiliary fireman was 'sentenced to six months in prison for stealing three lighters and a pipe from bomb-damaged premises' (Thomas 2003: 84), while sixteen soldiers convicted of looting from homes in Kent in 1942 were 'handed down terms ranging from five years penal servitude to eight years hard labour' (p. 80).

There were many other examples of anti-social crimes perpetrated by public officials and professionals during the war. A Liverpool city councillor was sent to prison for seven years and fined £2000 in 1942 for supplying false documentation relating to the 'reserved' occupations of his business employees (Gardiner 2004: 508). The Food Executive Officer in Barking was sentenced to three years of penal servitude for issuing illegal permits for sugar (Thomas 2003: 140–1). There were also a number of cases of medical practitioners being struck off by the General Medical Council or prosecuted for issuing false certificates that enabled patients to avoid conscription or delay their return to active service (pp. 48–9).

Finally, professional criminals continued their activities much as before. There was no let up in the number of robberies, racketeering and counterfeiting, although the introduction of rationing did alter the 'pattern' of crime with increased theft of items such as butter, bacon, sugar and cigarettes. Professional criminals were also quick to exploit new opportunities for illegal activity, such as pick-pocketing and pilfering at public shelters, ransacking unguarded premises during the blackout and 'bomb larks' (fraudulent claims for bomb damage – Thomas 2003).

Treatment of aliens and anti-Semitism

The wartime solidarity observed on the Home Front did not always extend to 'aliens' or minorities. As Smith (1996) notes, 'If the war created a new sense of social solidarity, it did not include Jews, blacks, the Irish, German and Austrian refugees or Italians living in Britain' (p. 10).

In wartime conditions it would have been unrealistic to expect the public to maintain positive attitudes towards those residing in Britain whose allegiances appeared to be with the enemy. As Calder (1971) notes, 'the most obvious targets for hatred' were the settled German community living in Britain, as well as the 60,000 German and Austrian refugees who had fled to Britain to escape Nazi persecution (p. 150). The initial 'liberal' phase of internment, which came into effect in September 1939, seemed to meet with general public approval. Around 600 German or Austrian nationals were detained, while a further 9000 had restrictions placed on their movements. Within a few months, however, public support for more stringent controls, such as mass internment had intensified. This hardening of public opinion can be linked to various factors. First, right-wing anti-alien press campaigns were mounted by newspapers such as the *Daily Mail*, *Sunday Express*,

Sunday Dispatch and *Sunday Pictorial*. Secondly, the activities of refugee 'fifth columnists' were widely reported to have played a significant part in the successful German invasions of Norway and the Netherlands. In a BBC broadcast on 30 May 1940, Sir Nevile Bland, the government minister at The Hague, informed the British public that they should be suspicious of anyone with 'German and Austrian connections' (Kushner 1989: 146). Thirdly, official resistance to a policy of mass internment dissipated following concerted military pressure that a measure of this kind was needed to address the significant threat posed to national security by aliens. As a consequence, just over 27,000 aliens were interned by the end of June 1940 (see Lafitte 1944; Gillman and Gillman 1980).

The entry of Italy into the war in the same month led to mobs attacking the business premises of Italians in a number of British cities, such as London, Liverpool, Cardiff and Swansea. 'The worst violence took place in Glasgow, Clydebank and particularly in Edinburgh. *The Scotsman* reported smashing and looting in Leith Street with arson attacks, the crowd singing patriotic songs, people taken to hospital with head injuries, many arrests and rumours of a shopkeeper being killed' (Gardiner 2004: 223).

The war did little to foster more positive public attitudes towards the Jewish community in Britain. As Kushner (1989) points out, 'Strains of the phoney war, strains due to the threat of invasion, strains due to the hardships of rationing, strains of mass evacuation, strains of war weariness, all needed an outlet and the Jews were often a suitable scapegoat' (p. 194). Jewish people were liable to be accused of all forms of anti-social activity, including fleeing to the safest billets, evading the call-up, avoiding fire-watch duties, ostentatious displays of wealth and pushing to the front of queues (Calder 1971; McLaine 1979). Jewish wholesalers and retailers were also accused of controlling 'black markets'. Some Jewish traders, like their Gentile counterparts, were involved in illegality of this kind, but their 'un-British conduct attracted disproportionate publicity and greater opprobrium' (Kushner 1989). Unfounded rumours were even put about that 'panicking Jews' had caused the Bethnal Green tube station disaster in June 1943 in which 173 people lost their lives (Kushner 1989; Report on an Inquiry into the Accident at Bethnal Green Tube Station Shelter 1945).

Enemy propagandists and the British Union of Fascists whipped up anti-Semitic sentiments suggesting that Britain was fighting the war to defend the interests of Jewish capitalists. Lord Haw-Haw's broadcasts from Germany, which 'no fewer than 24 million' citizens admitted to listening to on an occasional basis (Hylton 2001: 181), often included derogatory references to Sir Izzy Myrgatroyd, a fictitious Jewish tax evader.

Official reticence to confront the issue of anti-Semitism during the war only served to increase its prevalence. Requests from the Jewish Board of Deputies for the government to take a more active stance in combating

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anti-Semitism were rebuffed on the grounds that pro-Jewish action of an 'official' kind would prove counter-productive (Kushner 1989).

Strikes and absenteeism

The idea that the experience of war would lead to greater industrial unity is hard to substantiate. The persistence of strike activity and absenteeism during the war years suggests that workers and employers were not prepared to set aside deep-rooted antagonisms in order to pursue national as opposed to class interests. Although the number of days lost through strike action decreased from 1939 to 1940, 'thanks to Dunkirk' (Calder 1971: 299), there was a steady increase in all the subsequent years of the war rising from 1,077,000 in 1941 to 3,696,000 by 1944 (Central Statistical Office 1995, Table 3.30, p. 64). Coal mining was by far the most strike prone industry 'accounting for two-thirds of the days lost in 1944' (p. 456). According to one Mass Observation report of the situation in factories in the north of England in 1941:

one looked and listened in vain for any sign of a unity binding all parties in the fight against Germany. From the men, one got the fight against management. From the management one experienced hours of vituperation against the men. Both sides claim to be concerned only with improving the situation to increase the strength of the struggle against Fascism, but, nevertheless, the real war which is being fought here today is still pre-war, private and economic.

(Quoted in Smith 1996: 45)

Although strikes had been made illegal under wartime regulations, there was a reluctance to enforce the law given the coalition government's desire to maintain good relations with the trade unions and avoid unnecessary confrontation. So, for example, when the Betteshanger colliery dispute was resolved in 1942, the Home Secretary moved quickly to ensure that the three imprisoned 'ringleaders' were released from custody and that no subsequent attempts were made to imprison strikers (Gardiner 2004: 516–17).

According to official estimates, absenteeism also increased in the period from 1941 to 1943 before levelling off in subsequent years (no figures were kept for the early years of the war). 'The average absence for men was 6 to 8% of man-hours worked and for women an average of 12 to 15%' (Mackay 2002: 121). The greater level of absenteeism amongst women reflected their additional responsibilities in relation to unpaid care and domestic tasks. As Mackay (2002) notes, the higher incidence of 'female absenteeism reveals less about commitment to victory than about the failure of employers and other family members to adjust their thinking to take account of the unequal burden that fell on so many women' (p. 123).

Younger people proved, however, to be the worst culprits in terms of

absenteeism and time keeping. Some of the more persistent offenders were brought before the courts. A young factory worker, Dora Murrell, for example, was summoned to appear before Croydon Magistrates for 'being late for work on no fewer than 49 occasions and absent altogether on 2 days' (Waller 2005: 271). The defendant argued, unsuccessfully, that her poor time keeping had been due to her modest wages, which could not stretch to the purchase of a scarce and expensive item such as an alarm clock. 'A fine of £4 and £1 1s costs no doubt put the clock even further out of reach' (p. 271).

Unfair sacrifices

There was certainly a general feeling at the time that the contributions offered by or demanded from more affluent citizens in furtherance of the war effort were inadequate. There were suggestions that better-off families in the rural reception areas were able to use their influence to avoid being drawn into the evacuation scheme. Officials seemed reluctant to heed government advice about the need to operate the billeting scheme 'without fear or favour' if this ran the risk of antagonising influential local land-owners or dignitaries (McLaine 1979: 176). Furthermore, according to a Home Intelligence report of 1942, some members of the public held the view that rationing had less effect on the rich than 'ordinary' people. The rich it was argued were still able to eat at expensive restaurants (though they were, in theory, restricted to one main course from July 1940), purchase 'high priced goods in short demand, such as salmon and game', 'spend more on clothes and therefore use their coupons more advantageously', 'receive preferential treatment' from retailers because of their higher purchasing power and enjoy more plentiful supplies of petrol (quoted in Smith 1996: 47-8; see also Waller 2005). Some wealthy citizens even enjoyed enhanced protection during the air raids in London because many of the restaurants and clubs they frequented had deep underground basements. The Stepney Tenants Defence League organized a mass protest at the Savoy hotel during an air raid in September 1940 to highlight this particular inequity (Lewis 1986). Upper-class women also had the choice of being able to opt for voluntary, rather than paid work during the war. This enabled them not only to avoid being conscripted into the services or engaging in munitions work, but also allowed them to take time off whenever they liked (Smith 1996: 44).

Compiling the scorecard

Revisionist accounts of the impact of war on the Home Front provide a valuable counter-balance to some of the more rosy official accounts of civilian morale and behaviour during this era. Certainly, it is possible to challenge Titmuss' (1950) contention, outlined in his influential study *Problems*

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of Social Policy, that the experience of total war had led to a greater sense of social unity and to growing demands for government to play a leading role in creating a fairer post-war society.

One question that needs to be addressed is whether the evidence relating to anti-social behaviour and attitudes during the war is sufficiently strong to overturn the broad thrust of the Titmuss thesis. Might there be, as Lowe (2004a) reminds us, a danger that in focusing on the 'recorded failings of a few' we might overlook the unrecorded 'merits of the many'? (p. 619). Following an extensive review of the evidence, one contemporary scholar, Robert Mackay (2002), suggests that pro-social activity, such as volunteering 'far outweighed the negative features of civilian behaviour on the home front – absenteeism, strikes, looting, blackmarketeering and the like. The sheer bulk of volunteering should stand as a reminder to commentators that most people behaved well – many of them outstandingly well – in the trying conditions of war. The failings of the few are, of course, part of the history of the war, but they should never be allowed to obscure the merit of the many' (p. 133). This seems to be a reasonable conclusion to draw. The sacrifices made both by service personnel and those on the Home Front lend strong support to the notion that citizens were more willing to make greater efforts to help one another during the war.

Another question to resolve is whether this upsurge in community spirit led to deeper attitudinal changes amongst the British people. As was noted previously, there is evidence to suggest that there was a 'leftward' turn in the public's political outlook. Wartime experiences had alerted citizens to the ways in which government intervention could lead to more equitable economic and social conditions. Electing a reform orientated post-war government that was committed to improved living standards, full employment, social security, health care and enhanced educational opportunities for all, came to be seen as preferable to a return to rule by the 'guilty men' of yesteryear. Moreover, the war did seem to have increased the public's awareness of the commonality of human needs. State welfare provision was increasingly perceived not only as benefiting one's own family at a time of need, but also those of one's fellow citizens. This positive approach to state intervention was not confined to working class citizens. Growing numbers of middle-class citizens also believed that their life chances could be enhanced by a more interventionist government (McCullum and Readman 1964).

Of course, the increased level of public support for a fairer society was interpreted by some as indicative of a desire for a full blooded version of democratic socialism. There was disappointment in post-war Labour circles when it became clear that the public's appetite for the creation of a peacetime socialist commonwealth based on the selflessness and co-operation that had emerged during wartime was limited.

The reconstruction of British society was one of the central issues for the wartime coalition government. The next section will revisit the question of

whether the two main coalition parties shared a common vision of the role that social policy could play in this process of reconstruction.

Social policy and the coalition government 1940–45

According to one influential commentator, Paul Addison (1977), the Churchill coalition 'proved to be the greatest reforming administration since the Liberal government of 1905–14' (p. 14). The policies pursued by the coalition should not be regarded, he argues, as a pragmatic wartime accord. On the contrary, a 'massive new middle ground had arisen in politics. A species of consensus had existed between Stanley Baldwin and Ramsey MacDonald in the 1920s: a consensus to prevent anything unusual from happening. The new consensus of the war years was positive and purposeful' (p. 14). Others, however, take a contrary position. According to both Brooke (1992) and Smith (1996), although there were a number of important collaborative welfare initiatives during the war, these should *not* be regarded as evidence of a genuine convergence between the Conservatives and Labour during this time. The key question to consider here is whether the wartime reforms that were introduced by the coalition government can be viewed as uneasy compromises or the emergence of a more durable form of welfare consensus.

Although Labour recognized that the war would provide a unique opportunity to demonstrate the superiority of socialist ideas, such as state planning, they were unwilling to serve in Neville Chamberlain's initial wartime government preferring to remain as a constructive opposition party (Brooke 1992). However, when the tide turned against the Chamberlain administration, following the retreat of the British Expeditionary Force from Norway, Labour did agree to join Churchill's government in May 1940. Sixteen Labour members joined the government, of whom two, Attlee and Greenwood, were appointed to Churchill's war Cabinet.

Labour's decision to serve in Churchill's coalition government was based on a careful calculation that the benefits of this course of action would outweigh the costs. Participation would, for example, enable leading figures within the Party to gain invaluable administrative experience and to demonstrate to the public their suitability for office. By joining the coalition, Labour would also be in a much better position to influence the wartime political agenda, particularly in relation to social and economic reconstruction. On the downside, there was an undoubted risk that if Labour ministers were seen to be overly enthusiastic in their support for 'non-socialist' coalition policies on grounds of national unity they were liable to face severe criticism from rank and file members of their own party.

In practice, there were significant differences of opinion within the Party as to the underlying purpose of Labour's membership of the coalition.

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While leading Labour members of the coalition, such as Attlee and Morrison wanted to push the government in a socialist direction, they acknowledged that there would be severe limits on how much they could achieve given Conservative domination of the administration. In contrast, those on the left of the parliamentary Party such as Laski, Bevan and Shinwell believed that the sole purpose of Labour's presence in government was to bring about significant socialist economic and social advance. Not surprisingly, perhaps, Labour ministers always tended to emphasize the progress they were making within the constraints of coalition government while their opponents in the wider Labour movement stressed their too ready acquiescence with Conservative policy objectives. In the economic sphere, for example, Labour ministers pointed to their success in nationalizing the fire service, and in establishing greater public control in relation to the railways and the coal industry. For many Labour backbenchers, half hearted reforms of this kind amounted to a betrayal of socialist principles. Full nationalization of both the railways and the coal industry were regarded as the minimum goals to be achieved if Labour's membership of the coalition was to be judged worthwhile (Brooke 1992). In terms of social policy, Labour's coalition ministers emphasized the positive role they had played in 'replacing' the household means test with an individual income test in 1941 and in securing an increase in old age pension allowances in 1942. For those on the left, though, these measures were deemed to be inadequate and indicative of a lack of true socialist resolve on the part of Labour ministers.

Up until the time of the publication of the Beveridge Report there had been limited progress in relation to the post-war economic and social reconstruction of society. Addison (1977) argues that this was due to the lack of drive on the part of Greenwood, the Labour minister with responsibility for reconstruction, to press ahead with the reform agenda. For Brooke (1992), in contrast, the lack of progress is better explained by the fact that the Reconstruction Priorities Committee lacked executive powers and by the pressing need to focus on the military campaign.

The Beveridge report

The reconstruction debate was ignited by the publication of the Beveridge Report in 1942. It proved to be a significant source of friction between Labour ministers and their own backbenchers. Although the latter believed that the Report was capable of improvement in several respects, they recognized that it had much in common with official Labour policy and were quick to offer their support. In particular, the backbenchers recognized the symbolic significance of the report and as such were keen to exploit this to the full. As Brooke (1992) notes, 'Some in the Labour Party went as far as to suggest that the struggle for the implementation of the Beveridge Report

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should be regarded as the struggle for socialism' (p. 147). While Labour ministers were enthusiastic about the Report, the Conservative members of the coalition were more circumspect. Churchill feared that implementing the Report's proposals would detract from the war effort (Jefferys 1994) and measures were taken to dampen down popular expectations. The publication of an Army Bureau of Current Affairs overview of the Report, for example, which included an introduction by Beveridge, caused consternation in official circles and was withdrawn from circulation by Sir James Gregg, the Secretary of War.

In response to Conservative anxieties, a compromise response to the Report was agreed, which left open the vague possibility of wartime implementation. Inevitably, this proved unsatisfactory to many Labour backbenchers. Despite concerted efforts by Morrison to head off a Labour 'rebellion', some 97 Labour backbenchers supported a motion condemning the government's stance on the Report at the end of a three-day debate in February 1943.

The Beveridge Report proved to be the catalyst for a more concerted emphasis on national reconstruction. By June 1943 Attlee, Bevin and Morrison had circulated a paper to Cabinet entitled 'The Need for Decisions', which set out the importance of implementing economic and social reform during wartime, rather than waiting until the nation's financial position had been assessed at the end of the war. As Brooke (1992) notes, 'The three urged decisions and the preparation of legislation on such questions as land and its use, building, water supply, reorganization of transport, heat and power, social security, education, agriculture, full employment, industry, export trade, health, and colonial policy' (p. 181). This pressure elicited a positive response from Conservative members of the coalition. In November 1943, a Ministry of Reconstruction was established under the direction of Lord Woolton. This proved to be highly significant in ensuring that reforms in social security, education and health moved up the political agenda.

While compromise agreements were reached in all these areas, it is important to recognize that the Conservatives tended to regard the proposed measures as the endpoint of a 'modernizing' process, while Labour viewed them as merely the first steps on the road to reform. Certainly, there are indications that many in the Labour movement had strong reservations about the direction of post-1943 coalition social policy. While the White Paper on social security published in September 1944 adhered to many of the prescriptions laid down by Beveridge, the coalition's unwillingness to agree to the introduction of subsistence benefit rates or open-ended benefit claims proved disappointing to many Labour supporters.

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Education and health reforms

In the field of education, the 1944 Education Act was generally well received in Labour circles, although again it was seen as the first step in securing educational advance. The Act met Labour's two principal educational objectives. These were ensuring that all children had access to free secondary education tailored to their respective aptitudes and abilities and raising the school leaving age from 14 to 15 years. However, both the London Labour Party (LLP) and the National Association of Labour Teachers (NALT) expressed concerns that while 'The Act formally instituted a system of undifferentiated secondary education,' it 'informally enshrined a rigid tripartite structure' (Brooke 1992: 187). Assurances from Chuter Ede, the Labour Secretary of State at the Board of Education, that the Act would guarantee parity of status between grammar, modern and technical schools held little sway amongst either the LLP or NALT, who wanted to see the establishment of classless multilateral schools. Concerns were also raised about the failure to incorporate direct grant schools into the state scheme, as well as the unnecessary 'concessions made to denominational interests and the failure to set a date for the raising of the school-leaving age to 16' (p. 198).

There were even sharper divisions between Labour and the Conservatives over the question of health reform. The task of devising coalition health policy had fallen to the National Liberal MP Ernest Brown (until the Conservative Henry Willink replaced him in October 1943) and Tom Johnson the Labour Secretary of State for Scotland. The White Paper, *A National Health Service*, finally emerged in February 1944. Its original publication date had been delayed by Churchill at the last minute so that his two most loyal advisors, Brendan Bracken (the Minister of Information) and Max Beaverbrook (the Lord Privy Seal) could scrutinize the proposals to ensure that they did not undermine the Conservative standpoint (see Brooke 1992). The White Paper represented a decidedly uneasy compromise between the two Parties. For example, Labour's preference for the establishment of health centres staffed by salaried state doctors was tempered in the report by the recommendation that medical professionals working on a part-time basis in these centres would, like those who worked outside, continue to receive capitation fees. These payments were seen as preserving 'the sacrosanct link between doctor and patient with its notions of independence for the physician and free-choice for his or her client' (Hennessy 1993: 135). Predictably, the document failed to receive a ringing endorsement from either Labour or the Conservatives. Labour remained concerned about the continuation of capitation payments, the role of the voluntary hospitals and the prioritization of the interests of doctors over patients. Many Conservative supporters, not least those in the British Medical Association, objected to what they considered to be the first step towards a wholly salaried medical service and to the threat the White Paper posed to the autonomy of the

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voluntary hospitals. Indeed, such was the virulence of the Conservative/professional response that Willink subsequently made a peace offering including an extension of the so-called panel system (under which insured patients could choose a doctor from a list of participating practitioners), as well as 'the establishment of a medical profession dominated bureaucracy, and, worst of all for Labour, the agreement that health centres were merely to be experimental' (Brooke 1992: 213; see also Jones 1999).

The coalition government: a phoney consensus?

Opinion remains divided over whether a welfare consensus emerged during the period of Churchill's coalition government. Both Addison and Lowe, for example, contend that this administration represented a staging post for the welfare consensus that lasted until the late 1970s. According to Addison (1977), the Attlee government of 1945 'had only to consolidate and extend the consensus achieved under the Coalition' (p. 261). Lowe (1990) argues that 'during the period of serious reconstruction planning between February 1943 and summer 1944, there was all-party consensus on both the ability of government to resolve the many problems which had bedevilled the interwar years and the broad principles by which reform in the medium term should be guided. The consensus covered all areas of welfare policy' (pp. 168–9).

While it can be argued that the Conservatives were prepared to accept increased state intervention during the war, they remained at best reluctant, pragmatic collectivists (see George and Wilding 1976). The wartime experience had convinced many Conservatives that increased interventionism was necessary to deal with the increase in the working class electorate and the changing 'structural needs of an advanced industrial economy' (Lowe 2005: 21). Such pragmatic adaptation should not, however, be seen as denoting a shift towards an ideological consensus with Labour over the need for profound economic and social change. Although ministers such as Butler were beginning to embrace a more interventionist form of Conservatism, there remained a deep seated opposition to collectivism *per se*. As Smith (1996) notes, 'The traditional view that the war stimulated a consensus on the expansion of state activity pays insufficient attention to the reaction against collectivism which intensified during the war's final years' (Smith 1996: 26). Several pressure groups emerged during the early 1940s with the expressed aim of defending the 'free enterprise' system. These included the Aims of Industry (1942), the Progress Trust and The Society for Individual Freedom (which was established in 1942 following the amalgamation of the National league of Freedom and the Society of Individualists). 'These groups were supported by prominent Conservatives, including Ralph Assheton, who became Conservative Party Chairman in 1944, A.G. Erskine-Hill, Chairman of the Conservative Party's back-bench 1922

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Committee, and Henry Willink, the Minister of Health from 1943 to 1945' (p. 26).

While Labour members of the coalition government attempted to develop progressive, if not socialist, policies they were clearly frustrated by Churchill's limited enthusiasm for social reform, as well as the delaying tactics that he and other Conservative ministers employed to undermine the reconstruction agenda. The wartime 'accords' they entered into were not regarded either by Labour ministers or the Party more generally as evidence of a growing ideological consensus. As Brooke (1992) makes clear, 'a review of Labour's wartime approach to domestic reconstruction and the politics of coalition suggests that the consensus argument is a deeply flawed one' (p. 340).

Despite Labour's reservations about governing in coalition, the allied victory over Germany created a dilemma. Would the Party's longer-term interests be best served by a continuation of the coalition until victory over Japan had been assured or, at the very least, until a new electoral register had been compiled? While there was no question of Labour 'combining with the Conservatives on an electoral programme or participating in a "coupon" election' (Brooke 1992: 304), ministers such as Attlee and Bevin saw no urgent need for an early election believing that the continuation of the coalition might, in the event of a subsequent Conservative victory at the polls, prove to be the final opportunity to secure a further round of social reforms. It soon became apparent, however, that the magnitude of the gulf between the two parties over both economic and social policy was such that the coalition would inevitably come to an end. In May 1945, Churchill offered Labour the straight choice of continuing in coalition until the end of the Japanese conflict or an early General Election. Although Attlee, Dalton and Bevin were attracted to the former course of action, or some other compromise arrangements, strong opposition from the National Executive Committee led them to opt for a General Election. Following a brief 'caretaker' period of Conservative government (May–July 1945), a General Election was called for 5 July 1945.

The hard fought General Election campaign of 1945 shattered any illusion that party differences had narrowed during the war. There remained a huge gulf between the two parties over economic policy with the Conservatives favouring a speedy return to a free enterprise economy, while Labour stressed the need for public ownership, planning and controls. Although the Conservatives promised to introduce a National Insurance scheme, a comprehensive health service and a house building programme, these measures were presented as pragmatic reforms, rather than, as was the case with Labour, part of the transformation of society.

Conservative fears about Labour's alleged determination to install 'a permanent system of bureaucratic control, reeking of totalitarianism' (Dale 2000a: 68) were frequently raised during the election campaign. Indeed, the Conservative chairman, Ralph Assheton, was so convinced of

the need to alert the electorate to the imminent danger of Labour's totalitarian inclinations that he decided to donate one and a half tons of the Party's 'precious paper assignment for the general election campaign' to the publisher Routledge so that additional abridged copies of Hayek's influential anti-collectivist text, *The Road to Serfdom*, could be published before the election (Cockett 1995: 93). In his infamous first election broadcast on 4 June 1945, Churchill asserted that the election of a socialist government would lead to 'an attack on the right to breathe freely without having a harsh, clumsy, tyrannical hand clasped across the mouth and nostrils'. Labour, he declared, would have to 'fall back on some form of Gestapo' in order to curb 'free, sharp, or violently worded expressions of public discontent' (quoted in Kramnick and Sheerman 1993: 481).

Throughout the campaign, both Churchill and Beaverbrook sought to persuade the electorate not to be 'hoodwinked' by the apparent reasonableness of Labour's leadership, arguing that it was the 'alien' and unaccountable influence of the Party's chairman, Harold Laski, which would dictate the policy agenda of a post-war Labour government.

Labour vigorously rejected such assertions arguing that it was only a democratic socialist government that could bolster personal freedom, and provide an effective challenge to the monopoly power and profiteering that were endemic features of an unregulated capitalism. They also reminded the electorate that they were the only party who were enthusiastic supporters of the welfare state and economic interventionism. In the event, it was Labour's message that resonated with the public (see Adelman 1986). As Kramnick and Sheerman (1993) conclude:

the Tories were seen as the party of Munich, and Labour, not as wild revolutionaries but as efficient managers who had proved they could 'get the job done' in their wartime ministries. The forced sharing and mutual suffering of the war had produced a communal climate responsive to Labour's electoral message of a better-planned egalitarian society with full employment and improved social benefits for all.

(p. 490)

In summary, it is hard to dispute the claim that the Second World War had a positive impact on social attitudes thereby generating support for more egalitarian forms of state intervention. The suggestion that the wartime coalition government operated on the basis of a consensus is much harder to substantiate. Although Labour and Conservative members of the wartime coalition government reached 'agreement' over a number of social policy initiatives this did not, as the General Election campaign of 1945 demonstrated, amount to an ideological consensus.

In the next chapter, the democratic socialist approach to social policy adopted by the Labour governments from 1945 to 1951 will be revisited.