

# Beveridge at 70

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The Beveridge report was published at the high-watermark of British solidarity. In December 1942, its bold social principles – of universal coverage, full employment, family allowances, benefits in return for contributions, a national health service, and the right to citizen welfare – were readily accepted by the public and politicians of all parties as the way to ‘win the peace’ and remake British society following the ravages of war.

Over time the solidarity that underpinned the post-war settlement has been eroded; and the conditions of society which informed Beveridge’s conclusions have fundamentally altered. Public support for our welfare

state is often now witheringly low, and its politics poisonous. As Kate Bell and Declan Gaffney write on page 12, “...people have come increasingly to believe that social security is going to the ‘wrong’ people – extraordinarily, the public believes one in four claimants are committing fraud – and data from the British Social Attitudes Survey suggests that claimants are now seen as significantly more ‘undeserving’ than they were 20 years ago.” We often feel close to returning to distinguishing between the concepts

of the ‘deserving’ and ‘undeserving’ poor – whereby destitution was an individual ‘failing of citizen character’ – which early Fabians effectively banished whilst inventing modern social policy.

Beatrice Webb’s 1909 Minority Report to the Royal Commission on the Poor Law was the first appearance of many of the Beveridge principles, as well as some of the specific recommendations. Beveridge himself worked as a researcher for Webb and later wrote that his own report “stemmed from what all of us had imbibed from the Webbs”.

Beveridge was responding to the testing times he had lived through, just as the Webbs’ sought to address the grinding poverty the poor law manifestly failed to address. Following the financial meltdown of 2008,

Britain today now faces its own crisis – very different to previous ages’, but no less real. There is now broad agreement that the left needs a new welfare contract based on solidarity, contribution and earned entitlement as part of broader notion of equal citizenship. But what is the institutional and policy design that can make this work, with an aging population and huge fiscal challenges? And how can it be done with public support?

The Beveridge report is an obvious place to start looking for answers. Whilst times have changed, his recommendations speak across the decades in several ways. This report investigates what elements of the Beveridge report endure and what lessons can be learnt for the future of welfare.