

In 1945, just 2 months after the end of World War 2 in Europe, the British people voted to choose their next government.

During the war, the Beveridge report had set out how the welfare of the nation could be improved – by tackling the ‘five giants’ of Want, Disease, Ignorance, Squalor, and Idleness.

The Labour Party promised to act on the report’s recommendations – and they won a landslide.

Most people didn’t want to rebuild Britain the way it had been before – they wanted real change.

As the Beveridge report’s author said – “A revolutionary moment in the world’s history is a time for revolutions, not for patching”.

National Insurance aimed to deal with the worst effects of poverty. All workers had to pay a contribution from their weekly wage – in return receiving unemployment benefits, maternity benefits, and old age pensions.

And for those who were unable to work, The National Assistance Act provided means-tested financial help – and finally got rid of the Victorian workhouse system.

A new, unified ‘National Health Service’ was established for the first time.

Most doctors opposed the plans, but it was what the public wanted – 95 percent of citizens had registered as patients when it launched in 1948.

Treatment was free for everyone, and in much demand. An average of 7 million doctors prescriptions were issued every month in 1947 – rising to 19 million per month by 1951.

From 1945, education was changed too – a new law required all children to stay in school until they were at least fifteen.

All 11 year olds had to sit an exam – the ‘eleven plus’ – which determined much of the rest of their lives.

Those who passed went to grammar schools, then, often, universities.

Those who didn't pass went to 'secondary modern' schools – and on to work in trades, or lower skilled, lower paid work.

A huge housebuilding program was launched across the country – replacing not just bombed properties, but slum housing.

But it was slowed down by shortages of building materials.

By 1951, many of those who had served in the war were still waiting for new council homes...

To tackle unemployment, the government nationalised key industries such as steel and coal.

As the owner, the state would be able to keep people in jobs during economic downturns.

In practice, though, running nationalised industries efficiently proved difficult.

Together, these measures formed what became known as the 'welfare state' – establishing the public services and social protection in place to support people in Britain to this day.