

In 1939, as World War Two began, many British towns and cities faced the threat of aerial bombing. The government implemented its evacuation plan.

In just the first three days, 827,000 school age children were moved to safety in the countryside.

The evacuation created a new kind of social mixing, as children from poor, working class areas were lodged with middle class country dwellers.

Many host families were shocked to see how poorly fed and ill their new guests were. Large numbers of the children were infested with lice and fleas.

Back in the cities, new social connections were being made, as people from all classes and backgrounds took shelter from the German bombing raids together.

Britain depended on imports for 60% of its food, and with supply ships being sunk, the government took control of food distribution.

Ration cards were introduced to ensure, all citizens – the rich and the poor – got an equal amount.

The Ministry of Food even started issuing nutrition advice in an attempt to keep the population healthy.

The government became more directly involved in people's daily lives in other ways, too, as it nationalised key industries, and led campaigns to reduce waste, and collect scrap metal.

And in December 1942, economist Sir William Beveridge had been asked to consider how insurance against sickness and unemployment might be improved after the war.

In his report, he called the biggest social problems that were holding Britain back the 'Five Giants'.

They were: 'want' – poverty; 'disease' – ill health; 'ignorance' – the lack of education; 'squalor' – poor housing; and 'idleness' – unemployment.

He proposed that a universal welfare system should be put in place, paid for by contributions from all workers, and providing protection to all citizens.

It would involve a national health service, old age pensions and family allowances, education reforms, and a huge public house building program.

The war effort had made many people more open to the idea of a 'welfare state'

In the 1945 general election, the Labour Party won a landslide majority, after pledging to implement Beveridge's report, and build a welfare state which would care for citizens "from the cradle to the grave".