

HISTORY

OF SOCIAL WORK

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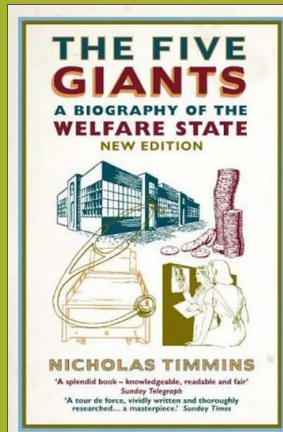
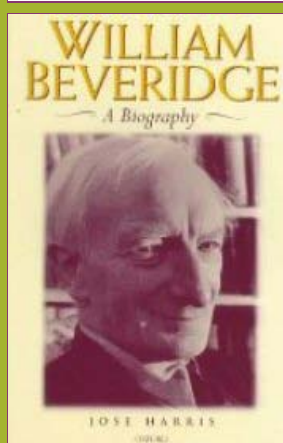
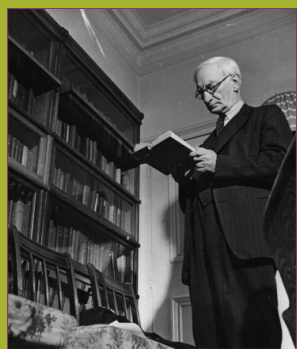
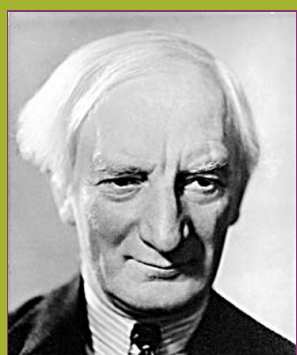
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1942 William Henry Beveridge

The architect of the welfare state



Most social work in western European countries is currently delivered within the context of the welfare state, whose origins can be traced back to the work of Sir William Henry Beveridge at the time of the Second World War.

Beveridge was born in 1879 in India, at that time part of the British Empire. He studied law at Oxford University where he became fascinated by early forms of social security, rapidly turning into an authority on pensions and unemployment benefits. At the beginning of the twentieth century, his thinking already had an impact on the development of a national insurance scheme and influenced policy on poverty in the UK. Soon after the First World War, he was knighted.

His work was greatly influenced by the [Fabian Society](#), who clearly also liked his work for they gave him the post of director of the [London School of Economics](#) (LSE).

Early on during the Second World War, the Minister of Health commissioned a committee to investigate the state of social services and welfare benefits in the UK and invited Beveridge to be chair. In 1942, the report *Social Insurance and Allied Services* was published, which quickly simply became known as 'the Beveridge report'. It was followed in 1944 by a report entitled *Full Employment in a Free Society*. Both reports were to have far reaching consequences, way beyond the government's initial intentions.

Beveridge's work labeled the main challenges for social policy as 'the five giants': squalor, ignorance, want, idleness and disease. Social insurance was but one element introduced to address these challenges. Equally important were education, health care, and housing and employment services. Social workers are currently active in all of these sectors. Beveridge argued for the state to have a central role in guaranteeing the necessary resources for people's welfare, as well as being the main provider of services. Every citizen would contribute to this universal system through national insurance payments, set according to his/her capabilities, and would be able to make use of it according to his/her needs. Key to all this was full employment.

In 1945, the Labour party won the elections and defeated Churchill. They quickly announced their intention to build a welfare state based on solidarity and regular earnings-related contributions, as described by Beveridge. This resulted in, among other things, the establishment of the [National Health Service](#) (NHS) in 1948. The relevance of Beveridge's approach was however not confined to the United Kingdom. Many leading politicians from across the world spent time in London during the Second World War, and were well aware of the proposals contained in the Beveridge report. Once peace was achieved, the ideas were exported by, for example, Arie van Rhijn to the Netherlands and Louis Major to Belgium. As such, it can be said that Beveridge was the architect of world-wide models for the modern welfare state.

There may have been one blueprint, but it was not just one type of welfare state that developed. Inevitably strategies for implementing the ideas in the Beveridge report were influenced by local politics and economic circumstances. As a consequence welfare systems across the world differ from each other and diverge from the original plans. Useful classifications of welfare states to describe this diversity have been made by Richard Titmuss (1974) and later by Gøsta Esping-Andersens (1990).

[Read more](#)

- Lynes, T. (1984), *William Beveridge*, in: P. Barker (Ed.), *Founders of the welfare state* (pp. 90-97). London: Heinemann

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This initiative also exists in Dutch, where it covers the history of social work in the Netherlands, in Flanders, and internationally.

See www.canonsociaalwerk.eu

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Additional information

-  Beveridge, W. (1942), *Social insurances and allied services*, the first 20 pages of `the Beveridge report`
-  Beveridge, J. (1954), *Beveridge and his plan*, London: Hodder and Stoughton. (PDF-file is 15Mb!)
- Timmins, N. (1996), *The five giants, a biography of the welfare state*, London: Harper Collins
-  x (1992), *50 years Beveridge report*, Special issue of International Social Security Review. Access to full papers is for subscribers only, but abstracts are available to all.

Links

- [The Sir William Beveridge foundation](#)
- [The Fabian society](#)

Study tasks

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