# Post War - Life in 1945

## The 1945 Election.

Churchill's role in the Second World War had generated much support for him amongst the British population, he was defeated in the 1945 election. Many reasons for this have been given, key among them being that a desire for post-war reform was widespread amongst the population and that the man who had led Britain in war was not seen as the man to lead the nation in peace.

With World War II coming to an end in Europe, the Labour Party decided to pull out of the wartime national government, precipitating an election which took place in July 1945. King George VI dissolved Parliament, which had been sitting for ten years without an election. What followed was perhaps one of the greatest swings of public opinion of the 20th century. In May 1945, the month in which the war in Europe was ended, Churchill's approval ratings stood at 83%, although the Labour Party held an 18% lead as of February 1945. Labour won overwhelming support while Churchill was 'both surprised and stunned' by the crushing defeat his political party suffered.

The greatest factor in Labour's dramatic win appeared to be the policy of social reform. In one opinion poll, 41% of respondents considered housing to be the most important issue that faced the country, 15% stated the Labour policy of full employment, 7% mentioned social security, 6% nationalisation and just 5% international security, which was emphasised by the Conservatives. The Beveridge Report, published in 1942, proposed the creation of a Welfare State. It called for a dramatic turn in British social policy, with provision for nationalised health care (NHS), expanded statefunded education (free education for all), national insurance and a new housing policy. The report was extremely popular, and copies of its findings were widely purchased, turning it into a bestseller. The Labour Party adopted the report eagerly. The Conservatives accepted many of the principles of the report (Churchill did not regard the reforms as socialist), but claimed that they could not be afforded. Labour offered a new comprehensive welfare policy, reflecting a consensus that social changes were needed. The Conservatives were not willing to make the same concessions that Labour proposed, and hence appeared out of step with public opinion.

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#### **Extra information:**

Labour - socialist and believed in "distribution" of wealth, care for all, government control (that still applies). Their policies meant that more and more people would depend on government for at least some part of their lives.

Conservative - more right wing, believed in small government and not overly interfering in peoples lives. Only those most at need should get government aid and the free market ruled.

# **VIDEO CLIP**

How did the war change the social
face of Britain?

## The Welfare State.

The modern welfare state in Great Britain started to emerge with the Liberal welfare reforms of 1906–1914 under Liberal Prime Minister Herbert Asquith. These included the passing of the Old-Age Pensions Act in 1908, the introduction of free school meals in 1909, the 1909 Labour Exchanges Act, the Development Act 1909, which heralded greater Government intervention in economic development, and the enacting of the National Insurance Act 1911 setting up a national insurance contribution for unemployment and health benefits from work.

In December 1942, the Report of the Inter-Departmental Committee on Social Insurance and Allied Services was published, known commonly as the Beveridge Report after its chairman, Sir William Beveridge, proposing a series of measures to aid those who were in need of help, or in poverty. Beveridge recommended to the government that they should find ways of tackling the five giants, being Want, Disease, Ignorance, Squalor and Idleness. He argued to cure these problems, the government should provide adequate income to people, adequate health care, adequate education, adequate housing and adequate employment. It proposed that 'All people of working age should pay a weekly National Insurance contribution. In return, benefits would be paid to people who were sick, unemployed, retired or widowed.'

The basic assumptions of the report were that the National Health Service would provide free health care to all citizens. The Universal Child Benefit was a scheme to give benefits to parents, encouraging people to have children by enabling them to feed and support a family. One theme of the report was the relative cheapness of universal benefits. Beveridge quoted miners' pension schemes as some of the most efficient available, and argued that a state scheme would be cheaper to run than individual friendly societies and private insurance schemes, as well as being cheaper than means-tested government-run schemes for the poor.

The report's recommendations were adopted by the Liberal Party, Conservative Party and then by the Labour Party. Following the Labour election victory in the 1945 general election many of Beveridge's reforms were implemented through a series of Acts of Parliament. On 5 July 1948, the National Insurance Act, National Assistance Act and National Health Service Act came into force, forming the key planks of the modern UK welfare state.

What was the welfare state?				