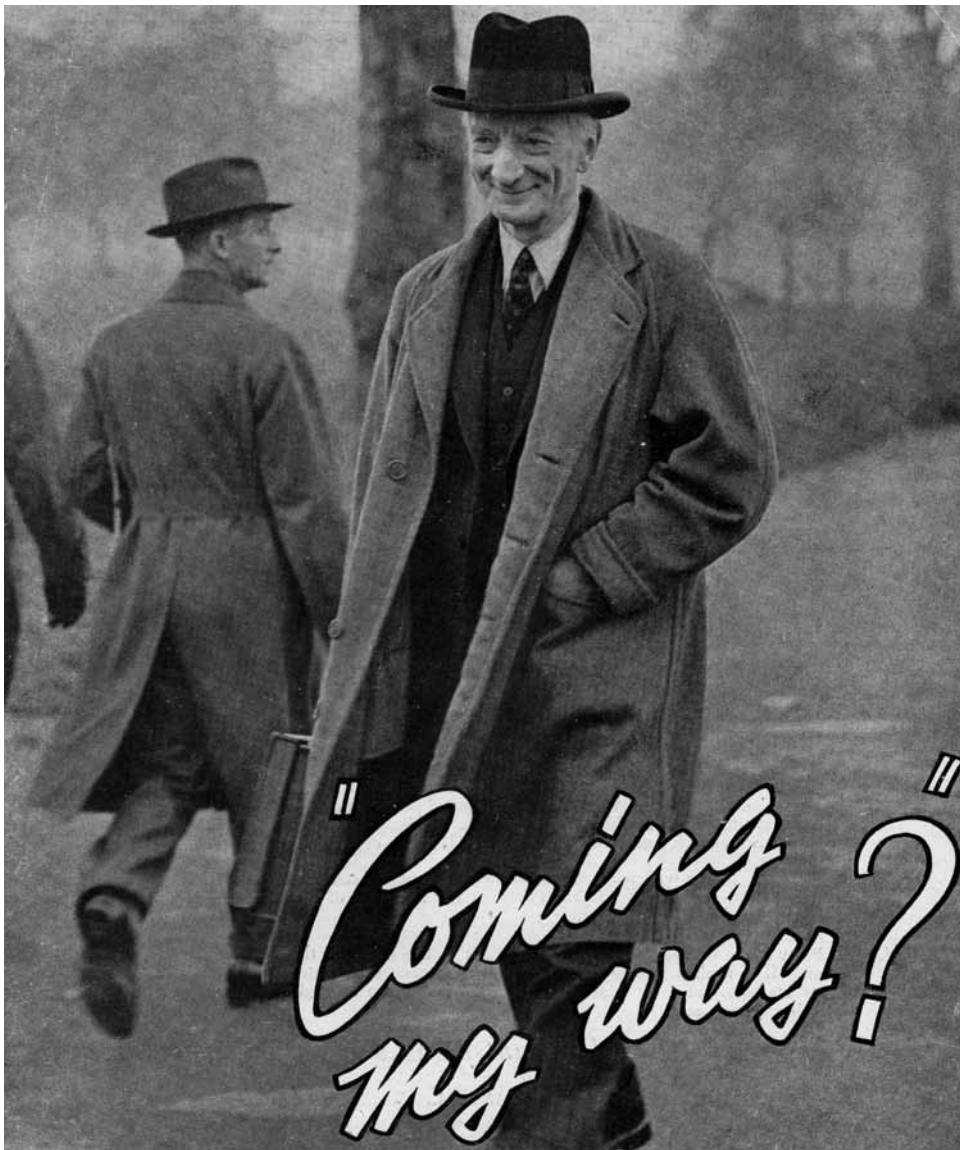


FATHER OF THE WELFARE STATE

It is 70 years since the Beveridge Report was published. It paved the way for the welfare state and framed thinking on social policy for generations to come. Here, **Hilary Weale** explores the former LSE Director's papers in the School's archives and finds that a place in history was by no means certain.



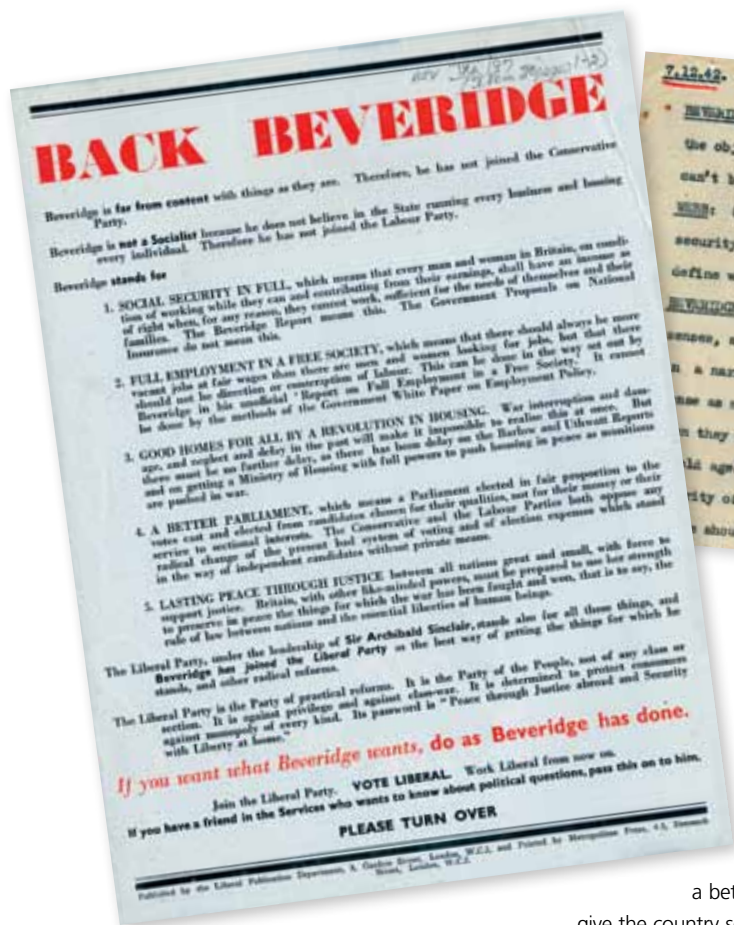
At 70 years' remove, William Beveridge's status as "Father of the Welfare State" is fixed. Yet the papers bequeathed to the LSE archives not only bring to life the circumstances in which the Beveridge Report was produced, but also indicate how uncertain it was at the time that the suggestions would be enacted through policy.

The main stumbling block was not simple political antagonism: broadly speaking, all parties were receptive to the plans, and to the need for a social and actual reconstruction of which they could be a part. Indeed, that is why the Committee on Social Insurance and Allied Services which produced the report had been set up: to rationalise the various types of state welfare provision that had arisen over the previous 50 years. But so ambitious was Beveridge's interpretation of the terms of reference, which had been to make a survey of "existing national schemes of social insurance and allied services, including workmen's compensation, and to make recommendations", that he became the sole signatory to the report, so as to avoid compromising the impartiality of the civil servants who made up the rest of the Committee.

Famously, Beveridge identified five "giants on the road to reconstruction": Idleness (by which he meant unemployment), Want, Disease, Squalor and Ignorance. While the Beveridge Report mostly dealt with Want, it was based on his belief that full employment was possible. Moreover, it was perhaps unemployment that exercised him the most, as his subsequent papers on the matter underline. The other radical pillars of his plan were a free national health service, a family allowance for the second and further children, and the abolition of poverty by comprehensive social insurance – one to which everyone contributed and could have access, not just those who fell below a certain line.

Countering worries that such a level of state provision might create a class of "idlers", Beveridge emphasised throughout his report that the corollary to support in time of need was more extensive citizenship, and a sense of duty and responsibility to do more than the minimum, and to seek work. The transcript of an interview with the BBC on 7 December 1942 leaves no doubt of his tight interpretation of the term "social security": "In my

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Previous page and this page, far left: Liberal party election leaflets

Left: BBC transcript, 1942

Report I have used it in a rather narrow sense as meaning the security of an income to take the place of earnings when they are interrupted by unemployment, sickness or an accident or ended by old age." He definitely thought that people should be financially better off in work, if able, than out. Furthermore, he supported a certain amount of coercion and retraining for those reluctant to work, or whose jobs had become obsolete through progress or changing working practices.

William Henry Beveridge

(1879-1963) was a student at the School in 1903-05 and LSE Director from 1919 to 1937. December 2012 marks the 70th anniversary of his famous 1942 Beveridge Report (officially, the Social Insurance and Allied Services Report), the basis of the 1945-51 Labour Government's legislation programme for social reform.

The Beveridge collection held in the Library contains over 500 boxes of his personal papers and can be viewed in the Archives reading room (lse.ac.uk/library/archive/Home.aspx). Some of these documents are available online, including a selection of photographs: see lse.ac.uk/library/archive/online_resources/online_resources.aspx

At the time of publication on 1 December 1942, with Britain deeply involved in the second world war, Beveridge's view was that to act upon his suggestions now to provide

a better standard of living for all would give the country something to fight for (and not just against). The war had also exposed the differences in provision between classes, in their ability to cope with the bombing and its aftermath. And, having lived through the 1914-18 war, he believed that wholesale reforms were needed to avoid the scale of economic depression and mass unemployment that had succeeded it in the 1920s and '30s.

That the Beveridge Report's economic details were worked out in collaboration with John Maynard Keynes and Lionel Robbins ensured its economic credibility, and helped it to gain support across the political spectrum. A note from Winston Churchill to his Cabinet, dated 14 February 1943, suggested that a group could be established to shape and polish the proposals, but says: "we cannot however initiate the legislation now or commit ourselves to the expenditure involved". This was not an out-and-out dismissal, but the lukewarm response was frustrating, and made for an awkward voyage when the two men sailed on the same ship to the United States in 1943, Beveridge to undertake a publicity

tour. Some social reforms did make headway under the Coalition government, such as R A Butler's Education Act and the Family Allowances Act. But then Churchill was

ousted in the General Election of 1945 – not least because of the Labour Party's emphasis on social reform – and the new government under Clement Attlee began to put in train parts of the Beveridge Plan, notably via the National Insurance Act, the Industrial Injuries Act, the National Health Service Act and the National Assistance Act.

As the "Back Beveridge" campaign leaflets illustrate, it was the Liberal Party that had, in fact, put the Report at the heart of its manifesto: Beveridge had been charged with leading their campaign, and himself stood for the Berwick seat. Alas, the Liberals returned only 12 members to the House of Commons, Beveridge not among them, and, although raised to the peerage shortly after, he did not play any practical part in implementing his ideas.

All the same, Beveridge's vigorous efforts to promote the report at home and abroad, the backing of influential figures in the parliamentary machine, and the post-war government's adoption of the principles enshrined in the report led in time to the creation of what we now call the welfare state, and ensured his place in political and social history. ■



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