

THE BEVERIDGE LEGACY

It is difficult to know whether Beveridge would recognise the child he is said to have fathered if he were to return 70 years on, writes **Howard Glennerster**.

The founding principle for the social security scheme Beveridge advocated was that basic state contributory benefits should be adequate to live on without means-tested additions. This has never happened. It was abandoned as even a distant goal by the Churchill government in the early 1950s and has never been successfully reinstated. Means testing, Beveridge claimed, was not what the British people wanted. In the years since 1948, and especially more recently, what they have been given is more and more means testing. This has led to all the things Beveridge foresaw – disincentives to work and save, and barriers to accessing the benefits.

The coalition government has said that it wants to move nearer to Beveridge's model of a single flat-rate minimum pension set above the means-test limit. The ensuing and continuing row between the Department of Work and Pensions and the Treasury about how to deliver this goal, if at all, is one that Beveridge would have found entirely familiar.

Beveridge's Plan rested on three basic assumptions which he spelt out:

- full employment
- a comprehensive health and rehabilitation service
- family allowances for all second and subsequent children

He would find all three either absent, disappearing or insecure.

Yet what he has bequeathed is the need to think big, to see the interconnectedness of social policy. Above all, he saw that the welfare state was not about handouts to the poor but a collective insurance against the risks to which everyone is subject. In the current economic climate this has more relevance than ever. A new French translation (Plon 2012) has been published with an introduction by Beveridge's biographer and former LSE colleague, Jose Harris. The foreword is by a certain François Hollande. ■



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