

From Poverty to Social Exclusion:
An Introduction to Social Policy

Answer 1

After World War II, leaders of Britain felt the need to give back to its citizens by raising the standards of living. The first step in this process was the Beveridge Report, prepared by the Inter-Departmental Committee on Social Insurance and Allied Services, chaired by William Beveridge. The report is said to be the blueprint for what we call the Welfare State. The report has been the guiding unit for all the welfare activities that were taken thereafter. The Beveridge Report was a milestone in that it was a genuine and a holistic effort to rid the British society of people's 'want' and hence poverty.

The salient features of the report were:

- It included a scheme for social insurance “scheme of social insurance against interruption and destruction of earning power and for special expenditure arising at birth, marriage, or death”¹. The scheme was based on six principles- flat rate of subsistence benefit, flat rate of contribution, unification of administrative responsibility, adequacy of benefit, comprehensiveness, and classification. These six principles helped the scheme to attain what it wanted to and set specific rules for achieving them.

¹ P Halsall, “Modern History Sourcebook: Sir William Beveridge: Social and Allied Services (The Beveridge Report), 1942”, (1999) {underlined version}.

- The report identified five ‘giants’ that were to be attacked to gain social security. They are Want, Disease, Ignorance, Squalor, and Idleness. Want was in fact the biggest factor that leads to the poverty condition and the report defined want for each class and in turn defined the responsibilities and needs of each class.
- The report aimed at removal of want through three main measures- children’s allowances, health, and rehabilitation and maintenance of employment.
- The report aimed at redistribution of wealth so that the even the poor enjoyed the necessities; this was to be obtained through contributions by people from higher strata. The population was divided into four main classes of working age and contributions by each class were set according to their capabilities.
- The report set three guiding principles for the task to be undertaken. They are:
 1. Any proposals for the future, while they should use to the full the experience gathered in the past, should not be restricted by consideration of sectional interests established in the obtaining of that experience.
 2. Organisation of social insurance should be treated as one part only of a comprehensive policy of social progress.
 3. Social security must be achieved by co-operation between the State and the individual. The State should offer security for service and contribution. The State in organizing security should not stifle incentive, opportunity, responsibility; in establishing a national minimum, it should leave room and encouragement for voluntary action by each individual to provide more than that minimum for himself and his family.

These salient features of Beveridge report formed an essential part in our knowledge of a 'welfare' state. Besides the above-mentioned features, the main part of the report was a schematic and a well thought out plan to implement the scheme and to find out the diseases of the society beforehand.

Answer 3

Beveridge Report in spite of its futuristic approach and of being a genuine effort for lifting the standards of living of people remained a sore issue for feminist commentators. The main reason was that the report was not just archaic when it came to distinguishing men and women but it also presented a bad picture of men dominating women. The report represented that women were not considered anything better than as serving their husbands. This basic nature of the report was highly opposed. Here are a few reasons that led to feminist commentators opposing the report:

- There was a clear differentiation of housewives in separation of classes and the report said that the contribution will differ from one class to another, according to the benefits provided, and will be higher for men than for women, to secure benefits for Class III-the housewives.
- There was a joint rate for a man and wife who are not gainfully occupied. This clearly indicates that a woman was not given priority as a 'woman'; her role was seen as that of 'wife' or 'homemaker'.
- A married woman's contributions were to be made by the husband. This again drew feminist commentators' ire, for this only meant men's domination over women.

- This is what J Lewis has to say about the report:

Feminists also attacked the welfare state as being, in essence, a mechanism for maintaining the dominance of men over women. In relation to the NHS, for example, they did not deny the material advantage which women gained from the right to free health care - a right they had badly needed in the 1930s. However, both in its caring role and as an employer, the NHS surreptitiously reinforced patriarchy. Power was held by doctors who were predominantly male. This meant that the importance, and even the existence, of female specific illness was often ignored. With women being the majority of those in subservient positions, such as nurses and ancillary workers, the NHS also provided a prime example of the sexual division of labor.²

The above points indicate that despite the efforts of William Beveridge to obtain a complete development of British people, he ignored an important class that of women. Not just the report shows his narrow mindedness about status of women in the society but it also shows that despite all the progress that west had made, it remained conservative in its basic approach. That approach was to consider women as homemakers rather than society-makers. The problem with the report was that despite being a positive effort to encourage general living, William Beveridge made the mistake of limiting women's role in the society. The fact that women were

² R. Lowe, "The Welfare State in Britain since 1945", Refresh, Vol. 18, 1994 {underlined version}.

not allowed the same benefits as men irked feminist commentators; in doing so, he had downgraded women and had ignored their role in building society.

The feminist commentators rightly opposed Beveridge report for its lack of 'trust' in women as the ones who could change the society or who contribute to the society.

Bibliography

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