

J. B. Priestley

Priestley kick-started a decade of intense artistic expression that helped formulate a public consensus for change which led to William Beveridge's 1942 report, the great reforming Labour Government of 1945, the foundation of the NHS and the creation of the welfare state.

Lee Hanson
writing in the introduction to Priestley's Book 'English Journey'

These words are very striking. How have things changed from the pre-war days when a writer like Priestley could have such a big readership. His works were readable and popular, but more than that, they carried a humanity with which people identified. Lee Hanson's words are fascinating "a public consensus for change which led to....."

Where is the public consensus today in 2023 – where is there a report which can compare with the Beveridge Report?

Beveridge was assisted by a brilliant young historian in compiling the report – Harold Wilson.

The "great reforming government of 1945" started the work, but was stopped in 1951 by the return of a Conservative Government. It really put a stop to the creation of a more humane society. The direction of travel changed to the American consumerist ideology.

There was little inspiration coming from the artistic world. Quite to the contrary, popular culture became driven by the inane jokes of comedians who always denigrated the public services like 'British Rail'. It became 'normal' to relegate the vision of Beveridge and Attlee to the dustbin of history. The popularism of the emerging Conservative Britain and modern consumerism subsumed the past achievements in the public mind. But the

benefits of those achievements - public services, integrated transport, cultural provision like libraries, museums, well funded schools and universities open to all irrespective of wealth. Parks and countryside open to all. And social welfare, the NHS, and the necessary regulation to make it all work through government control. And secure employment for anyone able to work – these achievements continued to be enjoyed by the people of Britain.

The Labour Governments of the 1960's and 1970's were genuine successors to the Attlee Government, but the mood of the country was becoming more Conservative.

All the valiant efforts came to an end in 1979 and the drive towards the ideals of Beveridge and Attlee died.

Steve Thompson
May 2023

NOTE: William Beveridge was a Liberal.

The Beveridge Report

Audio

<https://www.nationalarchives.gov.uk/education/resources/attlees-britain/beveridge-report/>

Summary

<http://filestore.nationalarchives.gov.uk/pdfs/small/cab-66-31-wp-42-547-27.pdf>

The Beveridge Report in full

<https://ia804705.us.archive.org/29/items/in.ernet.dli.2015.275849/2015.275849.The-Beveridge.pdf>