

THE WELFARE STATE IN BRITAIN SINCE 1945

The Welfare State in Britain since 1945

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Second Edition





Published in Great Britain by
MACMILLAN PRESS LTD
Houndmills, Basingstoke, Hampshire RG21 6XS and London
Companies and representatives throughout the world

A catalogue record for this book is available from the British Library.

ISBN 978-0-333-72138-4 ISBN 978-1-349-27012-5 (eBook)

DOI 10.1007/978-1-349-27012-5



Published in the United States of America by
ST. MARTIN'S PRESS, INC.,
Scholarly and Reference Division,
175 Fifth Avenue, New York, N.Y. 10010

ISBN 978-0-312-21633-7

Library of Congress Cataloging-in-Publication Data
Lowe, Rodney.

The Welfare State in Britain since 1945 / Rodney Lowe. — 2nd ed.
p. cm.

Includes bibliographical references and index.

ISBN 978-0-312-21633-7 (cloth)

1. Great Britain—Social policy. 2. Great Britain—Economic
policy—1945– 3. Great Britain—Politics and government—1945–
4. Welfare State. I. Title.

HN383.5.L69 1998

361.6'1'0941—dc21

98-18577

CIP

© Rodney Lowe 1993, 1999

First edition 1993

Second edition 1999

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08 07 06 05 04 03 02 01 00 99

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Preface to the Second Edition

The first edition of this book was published in 1993 to coincide with the fiftieth anniversary of what many regard to be the 'blueprint' for the British welfare state, the Beveridge Report. This second edition coincides with the fiftieth anniversary of the creation of the welfare state itself as represented by the 'Appointed Day' of 5 July 1948, when four major services including the National Health Service, National Insurance and National Assistance were implemented. The first edition was the first full history of the postwar welfare state but there are now several others. Two are exceptional. Howard Glennerster's *British Social Policy since 1945* demonstrates the power of a social scientist to reduce complex issues to simple, but far from simplistic, analysis. Nicholas Timmins' *The Five Giants* represents journalist skill and flair at its very best, particularly in relation to the Thatcher years. All those interested in the history of welfare policy and its relevance to the present can now sample – and, respective publishers and bank managers fervently hope, buy – all three books. Competition and thus effective choice, reputedly denied many consumers of welfare over the years, is consequently available in this respect at least.

The principal purpose of this edition is to expand the coverage of welfare policy since 1976. The opportunity has also been taken to correct certain errors in the previous edition, to note recent advances in scholarship (mainly in the footnotes and bibliographies), to strengthen international comparisons and to acknowledge regional variations within the United Kingdom, particularly in relation to Scotland and Northern Ireland. However, the opportunity has not been taken, as urged by several reviewers, to strengthen the theoretical content of Parts II and III. This would have altered the nature of the book for transient and contestable academic gain. Just as minimum insurance benefits were originally provided to give everyone a genuine opportunity to determine for themselves what level of security they wished, so a minimum of theory is provided in Part I to provide a platform for – but not to dictate the ultimate nature of – individual choice over how the history of Britain's postwar welfare state should be interpreted. A secondary purpose of the theoretical introduction is to make explicit, as is every historian's responsibility, the assumptions on

which evidence has been selected and analysis structured. In the rest of the book these assumptions remain largely, and deliberately, implicit.

As in the first edition, I have incurred many debts. Academic analysis of welfare policy is a modern tower of Babel where each policy area, let alone the major disciplines of history, economic and social history, politics, social policy and economics, has not only its own assumptions but also its own language. I have benefited from each, although I may not always have thought so at the time, and others may search unavailingly for proof. I should like to thank the Leverhulme Trust and the Economic and Social Research Council for financial support over the past five years. Grants from the latter have enabled me to work with Jane Lewis to produce a guide to official records co-authored by Paul Bridgen: *Welfare Policy under the Conservatives, 1951–1964* (PRO Publications, 1998). This is designed to encourage research in a vital but underestimated phase of the classic welfare state. Participation in the ESRC's Whitehall programme has also been invaluable, although I have yet to succumb to the postmodernist urgings of Rod Rhodes, its director. I am also extremely grateful for the hospitality extended to me by the Universities of Oslo and Stockholm, the Urban Research Programme at the Australian National University and St John's College, Oxford. Finally, I should like to thank Hilary Browne, Jean Richards, Heather Hernandez, Carol Marks and Marie Fraser for grappling with the amended manuscript, and my family, in particular Gini, Alex and Rebecca. Each in their own way has provided stimulation.

RODNEY LOWE