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Why Britain needs a new Beveridge and why politicians need to defer to the evidence

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ABSTRACT

In 1945 and 2024 the UK electorate returned Labour governments to Westminster with large majorities. The 1945 election campaign was framed around post-war reconstruction, with the Labour manifesto inspired by the 1942 Beveridge Report and centred on a plan for implementing it. This laid the very foundations for post-war evidence-based policymaking. In 2024, the Labour leadership promised a 'decade of renewal' and 'change', with five pledges, but with rather nebulous practical policy proposals for their mission-driven government based on a thoroughly evidenced assessment in their Manifesto, *Change*. In this article we critically reflect on the role played by social scientists in post-war planning, argue that looking back can help us contextualise the present, and suggest that the challenges the UK faces today needs a clearer articulation of a plan with a similar vision to that of the Beveridge Report. We conclude that politicians have every reason to defer to the evidence underpinning such a programme of reform.

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Introduction

In 1945, and almost eight decades later in the summer of 2024, the UK electorate returned Labour governments with large majorities. The 1945 election campaign was framed around post-war reconstruction. The Labour manifesto '*Let us face the future*' (Labour Party, 1945) was inspired by the 1942 Beveridge Report (Beveridge, 1942) and centred on a plan for implementing it (Bartley, 2018). Both the Beveridge Report (Beveridge, 1942) and the Labour Manifesto (Labour Party, 1945) involved social scientists, who consulted widely and mobilised multiple knowledges, and laid the foundations for the evidence-based policymaking in the 1940s and beyond. In more recent times, social scientists have consistently undertaken holistic examinations of the UK's complex social and economic problems (Dorling, 2014; Timmins, 2017; Wilkinson & Pickett, 2009), including for a post COVID-19 UK (British Academy, 2021). Today the discourse is dominated by talk of mission-oriented research, and moonshots (cf Mazzucato, 2018). Indeed the 2024

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Labour Party Manifesto *Change* had a commitment to ‘mission-driven government’ with a focus on five pledges (Labour Party, 2024, pp. 13–14).

The role of the social sciences in helping us understand the complex challenges confronting society has been a recurring theme since the establishment of *Contemporary Social Science* in 2011, including the importance of mobilising multiple knowledges to understand economy and society (Bannister & Hardill, 2014), of interdisciplinary social science (Burch, 2006; Hantrais et al., 2015), of ‘relevance’ as, for example, illustrated by Sue Duncan (2006), and of evidence-based policymaking (Hantrais & Lenihan, 2021).

It was against this background and taking inspiration from these traditions that in 2023 the UK-based Common Sense Policy Group, an interdisciplinary network of social scientists drawn from policy, practice and the academy, was formed in anticipation of the 2024 UK General Election. As a group we looked back to the 1942 Beveridge Report to help us move forward and develop actionable plans with the potential to become the policy reform of tomorrow (Johnson, Hardill, et al. 2023). We are hoping to change the world not merely interpret it (to misquote Marx) (cf Ward, 2006, p. 501). Such a plan for a more functioning UK could perhaps also contribute to European debates of how to resolve socio-economic crises and potentially counter the rise of the far right.

In this article we draw on Ongaro’s (2017, p. 266) work on the intellectual tradition of public administration which built on Machiavelli’s writings in *The Prince* and *Discourses on Livy*, in which he stresses the importance of learning from history to understand contemporary problems. We suggest that the challenges the UK faces today needs a clearly understood plan with a similar vision to that of the Beveridge Report. In the remaining part of this paper we first examine the 1940s and reflect on the Beveridge Report of 1942 and the public policies of the National Government and the subsequent Attlee Government. We then turn to the UK of 2024 and draw on work being undertaken by, amongst others, the Common Sense Policy Group. We then compare salient areas emerging from both contexts in a conclusion.

Breakthroughs in evidence-based policy in the 1940s

In May 1940, Neville Chamberlain’s government fell and was replaced by a cross-party Coalition under Winston Churchill. The leader of the opposition, Clement Attlee, was brought into the Cabinet. The Second World War was being fought on several fronts (Downing, 2022, p. 356). At home, daily life was regulated by food rationing by The Board of Trade and while people’s diet improved with food rationing and unemployment had almost been eliminated (Timmins, 2017, p. 33), life was a tremendous struggle for many. The social upheaval caused by the Second World War and particularly the experiences of large-scale population evacuation from major cities revealed serious shortcomings in existing social services (Brewis et al., 2021).

Media coverage about the inadequacies of existing services together with heightened public interest in social issues meant pressure for reform began to build across several policy areas (Holman, 1996; Thane, 2018). Labour members of the National Government, in particular, were looking to the future, mindful of the mistakes made during the First World War, with the hollow promises of Lloyd George’s ‘Homes Fit for Heros’ (Downing, 2022, p. 359). The Labour party was openly discussing a better future for Britain and local groups, such as local education associations, workers’ groups and

even the Women's Institute (WI) held meetings (Brewis et al., 2021). They were not necessarily looking for a socialist future, but they recognised a need to see a future in different terms from the past (Timmins, 2017). Some industrialists were also planning for change, for example *A National Policy for Industry* was published in 1942 (Downing, 2022, p. 361).

Guided by Attlee, the new National Government placed renewed emphasis on post-war planning and reconstruction which was part of boosting civilian morale at a pivotal moment in the war (Bew, 2016; McKinstry, 2019). Two key figures in planning for the future, Clement Attlee and William Beveridge understood poverty having volunteered at Toynbee Hall, the settlement in Whitechapel, after their university studies (Bew, 2016, p. 340). Toynbee Hall had been established in 1884 by Samuel and Henrietta Barnett, which they named after Arnold Toynbee, the historian, philanthropist and reformer. Their vision was to create a place for people to volunteer in the East End of London, to face poverty and give them an opportunity to develop practical solutions (Toynbee Hall, 2024). After volunteering at Toynbee, Attlee became a social worker in the East End of London and taught social work at the London School of Economics (LSE) before entering politics, first local and then national (Bew, 2016). In 1920, he published a visionary book *The Social Worker*, which drew on his lived experience (Dickens, 2017).

While a student at Oxford, Beveridge heard Canon Barnett telling students that it was their duty 'to go and discover why, with so much wealth in Britain, there continues to be so much poverty, and how poverty can be cured' (Beveridge, 1953, p. 9). An economist, Beveridge continued to study unemployment and in the interwar years was appointed Director of the LSE, and then Master, University College, Oxford, where he was assisted in his research by future Prime Minister, Harold Wilson. He also worked as a civil servant during the First and Second World Wars. Timmins (2017, p. 12) comments that it was Oxford and Toynbee that not only triggered a lifelong interest in unemployment and broader social questions but one whose academic training convinced Beveridge that policy should be based on exhaustive research and detailed analysis.

In June 1941, Beveridge, then working on wartime manpower requirements for the Ministry of Labour, was asked by Arthur Greenwood, Labour Minister for Reconstruction in the National Government, to chair an inter-departmental committee on the coordination of social insurance. Social insurance was uncoordinated, it had grown piecemeal since the Edwardian era and was spread across seven departments (Brewis et al., 2021; Hardill et al., 2017; Harris, 2004). At first, Beveridge was bitterly disappointed at the brief, but he did more than 'tidy up'. Rather, he considered 'social insurance as a whole, as a contribution to a better world after the war' (Timmins, 2017, p. 19), and in this endeavour was reunited with Harold Wilson, who was working as a civil servant, having been rejected – on medical grounds – for military service (Beveridge, 1953). The Committee, composed of civil servants, met on 48 occasions, consulted widely and received representations from 127 different organisations (Beveridge, 1943, p. 59).

Publication of the report was delayed by several weeks as some of the National Government cabinet, led by prime minister Winston Churchill, considered it 'too revolutionary' (Hardill et al., 2017). It is interesting to note that the Report carries the name of Beveridge alone. Beveridge commented that this was because the other members of the Committee were all civil servants, and the existence of the Committee did not mean that the National Government was associated in any way whatsoever with the

proposals of the Report, for which the Chairman alone was responsible (Beveridge, 1943, p. 59).

Published just after the important military victory at El Alamein, the report signalled 'a new phase of optimistic restructuring of social policy' (Alcock, 1999, p. 204). Beveridge identified five giant evils – squalor, want, ignorance, idleness and disease – which he argued had to be slain on the road to reconstruction. His plan proposed a free, at the point of entry, national health service, which had first been proposed by Beatrice Webb in her minority report of the Poor Law inquiry of 1909, comprehensive social insurance through the state, non-means tested family allowances and was predicated on full employment (Brewis et al., 2021). Beveridge's own caution about the 'revolutionary' changes he proposed is significant; his plans were to be a 'natural development from the past. It is a British revolution' and relied on maintaining the pre-war system of contributory insurance with payments from employers and the state (Beveridge, 1942, p. 31).

Beveridge (1943, p. 10) felt the Plan was part of a comprehensive programme of social reform directed to deal not only with want but with the four other giant evils of disease, ignorance, squalor and idleness. He also saw his Report as 'a contribution towards success in war' (Beveridge, 1943, p. 10); 'a revolutionary moment in the world's history is a time for revolutions' (Beveridge, 1942, p. 6). In para 458 he says,

the purpose of victory is to live in a better world than the old world; that each individual citizen is more likely to concentrate upon his war effort if he feels that his Government will be ready in time with plans for a better world. (Beveridge, 1942, p. 6)

Public interest and implementation

Mass Observation (M O), played an important wartime role in monitoring public opinion, captured how public interest in the forthcoming report and its role in reconstruction and building what it called 'A New Britain' grew during 1942 (Hardill et al., 2017). MO had been established in 1937 by two social scientists (Charles Madge and Tom Harrisson) and employed a range of methods in the study of everyday life (Madge & Harrisson, 1939). The Mass Project (MOP) was not one but several projects and included the 'Work Town' (Bolton) and 'Seatown' (Blackpool) sites led by Harrisson and the National Panel of part-time volunteer Observers led by Madge from London. A complicated mix of research methods were employed, and these changed over time. In addition to the collection of qualitative material, visual methods were also employed by the involvement of documentary film maker Humphrey Jennings and photographer Humphrey Spender. It faltered in the 1950s due to lack of funds, and was re-established in the 1970s, and is now led from the University of Sussex, where it continues to study everyday life.

During the War, MO recorded how more than 600,000 copies of the full report and its summaries were sold by February 1944. Their survey found that 92 per cent of those questioned knew about the report the day after publication (Hardill et al., 2017). Beveridge described this interest as 'public boom' (Beveridge, 1953, p. 319). Reactions were largely positive, but MO did pick up some scepticism, with comments that it was 'only a report' (Hardill et al., 2017).

While Beveridge has been described as 'egotistical' (Timmins, 2017, p. 11); 'vain, humourless and tactless' (Timmins, 2017, p. 15) he certainly knew how to use the media,

disseminating widely the key findings of the Report. He addressed a series of packed meetings across the UK, his 1943 book, *The Pillars of Security: and other war-time essays and addresses*, reprinted 19 lectures, articles and talks he gave in one year (1942–1943). The book was designed to ‘put that [Beveridge] Report more clearly into a proper perspective’ as ‘democracies, like Cromwell’s armies, need to know what they fight for and to love what they know’ (Beveridge, 1943, p. 11). One address on the Report at Oxford focused on a vision of a ‘New Britain’ (Beveridge, 1943, p. 80). Beveridge’s media campaign did not always go down well with the National Government, some Conservative politicians were terrified of the cost of the recommendations (Downing, 2022, p. 361).

Interest was not confined to the UK or British troops abroad. Indeed the Government arranged with the publisher Macmillan in New York for an American edition of the Report to be printed at top speed and netted \$5000 for the Treasury (Downing, 2022, p. 320). Beveridge undertook a speaking tour of North America, where his report sold 50,000 copies in six months (Beveridge, 1953; Hardill et al., 2017). The report was translated into 22 languages, enabling it to be widely read abroad, and it was distributed to war torn Europe by the RAF. Indeed, copies of the report were found in Hitler’s bunker (Micklethwait & Wooldridge, 2014).

The Labour Party endorsed the report, while the Conservatives, including Winston Churchill, were sceptical. The National Government was divided and Beveridge described a lack of engagement, including with Prime Minister Churchill (Beveridge, 1953). But Churchill misjudged the mood of country, indeed during the 1940s the Tories lost byelections as the country wanted change. Timmins (2017, p. 42) commented that because of El Alamein and the Beveridge Report ‘there was a future to look forward to – and one that the times demanded should be very different from the past’. Similar sentiments were echoed by Downing (2022, p. 361) who noted that while politicians sat on the fence, for many people the new year of 1943 brought a genuine hope that the post war world, when it came, would be brighter and fairer and would benefit from the shared experiences of wartime. In 1943, the Sheepshanks Committee was formed to look in detail at implementing the recommendations of the Report. In his contribution to the official history of the war, Titmuss (1950, p. 506) argued that, by 1945, government had come to accept responsibility for the health and well-being of the entire population.

The 1945 election campaign was framed around post-war reconstruction. Sociologist Michael Young, who had become secretary of the Labour Party’s Research Department, together with Herbert Morrison, Patrick Gordon Walker and Ellen Wilkinson wrote the Labour Party manifesto *Let us face the future* (Labour Party, 1945). The manifesto was inspired by The Beveridge Report, and embraced a plan for implementing it (Bartley, 2014, p. 116). Two of the authors, Michael Young and Ellen Wilkinson were born in Manchester, and both researched poverty. In 1939, Wilkinson published *A Town that was Murdered: The Life-Story of Jarrow*, about her constituency, noting ‘poverty of the poor is not an accident, a temporary difficulty, a personal fault’ (Wilkinson, 1986, p. 7). ‘The idea of this book is to take one town ... and to give a picture of capitalism at work’ (Wilkinson, 1986, p. 8). When Young left the Labour Party he completed a PhD at the LSE, a sociological study of families in East London, and co-authored *Family and Kinship in East London* with Peter Wilmott (Young and Wilmott, 1957). In the 1960s, he became the first director of the Social Science Research Council now the Economic and Social Research Council.

Let us Face the Future was an ambitious programme of social and economic reconstruction which helped secure Labour's first landslide majority and mandate (Thane, 2018). The country was ready for change, and there was a plan, and a vision, which the country understood and voted for. Addressing the problems identified in the Beveridge Report framed public policymaking in post war Britain (Digby, 1989). Alongside the nationalisation of key industries and utilities, Attlee's new government introduced a swathe of reforms which set up the key institutions of the welfare state.

Before we leave the 1940s, it was under Attlee's watch, that Government funding for the social sciences was first considered (Hardill, in press). In 1944, he set up a committee under Sir John Clapham – who was responsible for the work of the three research councils that existed at the time (agricultural, medical, scientific and industrial) – to consider whether there should be additional provision for research 'into social and economic questions' (Nichol, 2001, p. 1). The committee recommended not to set up a social science research council in the immediate postwar years (Nichol, 2001, p. 14). Funding was eventually approved in the 1960s, when The Social Science Research Council (SSRC) was founded following the establishment of a Committee by the UK Labour Government of Harold Wilson. The committee was chaired by Geoffrey Heyworth, who had been Chairman of Unilever in the 1940s and 1950s (Nichol, 2001). Michael Young was appointed the SSRC's first Director. We now move to consider 2024.

Most importantly, there was a clear belief among politicians that the policies set out were fundable, affordable and would, in time, increase aggregate demand and grow the economy. They were, of course, correct. By intervening in the economy, the Labour Government of 1945 laid the foundations for an unprecedented transformation in British society, creating considerable growth and radically improving outcomes in education, wealth and health. What was clear in 1945 was that politicians believed that they had the capacity to intervene and evidence set out means of doing so effectively. This has long since disappeared as a result of the neoliberal ideological shift from the 1980s onwards that has left politicians believing themselves incapable of action (Degerman et al., 2023).

Post-2010: austerity and reform

The need for a new Beveridge plan has been clear since the Global Financial Crisis of 2007–2008 (Taylor-Gooby, 2012; Wilkinson & Pickett, 2009). Since the 2010 general election, in effect, the ideological programme for government (Coalition and Conservatives) led by five Prime Ministers has been – in effect – an exaggerated version of the plan that has been pursued since the late 1970s: a rolling back of the state in terms of its economic activity and its investment in society (Armstrong, 2017; Common Sense Policy Group, 2024, p. 34; Johnson, 2023; Taylor-Gooby et al., 2017; Toynbee and Walker, 2017). The difference between the post-war and neoliberal consensus is that the former had a strong underpinning evidence base, informed by Beveridge (Blackburn, 2018), while the latter was almost wholly dependent on abstract deontic principles of justice (Degerman et al., 2023).

In effect, while Friedrich Hayek (2001) referred to outcomes produced by market economies in comparison to state socialist societies, he and others inspired by his writings, their fundamental concern lay in upholding equality via neutrality between conceptions

of the good. This requires a small state incapable of inflicting a particular conception of the good on individuals or of redistributing resources to individuals or groups (Hayek, 1960). The consequences of upholding equality as neutrality are relevant only insofar as they create scope for coercion – using individuals as means to the ends of others. This ensures that taxation – taking resources from individuals to benefit others – is always regarded as coercion insofar as refusal and evasion carries with it the threat of physical constraint – imprisonment, requisition of resources and further imprisonment for failure to pay. Because no particular conception of the good can legitimately be advanced by government, there can be no direct consequentialist programme by which to address, for example, social determinants of outcomes of importance to the functioning of society (see Degerman et al., 2023).

Policy since 2010 has constituted an unsustainable approach of reducing public investment, rolling back the state and leaving large parts of public infrastructure and utilities under the ownership of individuals and entities without any clear interest in the capacity of the UK and its citizens. The consequence has been a large-scale worsening in each of Beveridge's giant evils, which have been widely examined by social scientists (Armstrong, 2017; Dorling, 2014; Taylor-Gooby et al., 2017; Toynbee & Walker, 2017; Wilkinson & Pickett, 2009).

2024 and the need for evidence-based transformative policy

Before we turn to the UK in 2024 it is important to remember that the postwar period has seen power and decision making increasingly devolved from Westminster across the four UK jurisdictions (Hardill et al., 2006). Indeed, the three Celtic nations have previously been described as 'hidden' or stateless nations (Roberts & Baker, 2006, p. 27). The devolution project under the Blair Government made an *ad hoc* arrangement more rational and formal (Benneworth, 2006, p. 44). The current arrangement can be traced to the 1992 Labour Manifesto, which had a firm commitment to devolution for the island of Great Britain, to Scotland, Wales and the English regions (Benneworth, 2006, p. 47). Scotland and Wales were granted devolution through acts of parliament introduced after the referenda held in 1997 initiated by the Blair Labour government. Northern Ireland's conflicts and divisions have given its governance structures a more complicated character (Hughes & Ketola, 2021, p. 9). The devolution 'settlement' has not been static; indeed, its 'architect', in Wales, Ron Davies, described it as a 'process not an event' (Davies, 1999). The process slowed in the case of English when the regional structures were abandoned by the Coalition government of David Cameron post 2010. Nevertheless, the impact of devolution in several non-reserved key policy areas was vividly seen during the COVID-19 pandemic as the four UK jurisdictions had responsibility for example for emergency legislation and health policy (Hardill et al., 2022).

It was against this background that in 2023 the non-aligned UK-based Common Sense Policy Group was formed in anticipation of the 2024 UK General Election. Inspired by the work undertaken in the 1940s, a diverse interdisciplinary team of eighteen social, behavioural and health scientists drawn from policy, practice and from across the academy, mobilised their multiple knowledge sets, united by a commitment to employing rigorous social science qualitative and quantitative methods, to assemble the evidence to underpin policy recommendations.

The group was formed explicitly to capture expertise in ten key areas of domestic public policy: welfare, environment, utilities, health and social care, early years, education, housing, transport, democratic reform, taxation. This diversity of experience is also felt in the cross-party and geographically diffuse nature of the author body, reflecting a need to engage with the radically divergent experience of life in different parts of the UK. In some cases, contributors were drawn from existing networks, while, in others, new collaborations were formed. We were supported by a Consultation Group that drew on lived and professional experience in a range of health, education and other fields. Ours is not the only vision for re-imagining the UK, others include a vision for Positive Public Policy (PoPP) (Cairney et al., 2024).

The need for this work was more urgent in 2024 than in 2019 or 2017 or even 2015 insofar as there was no manifesto commitment within the two main political parties capable of addressing the social determinants of the outcomes that rightly occupy political attention (see Chen et al., 2023; Parra-Mujica et al., 2022; Villadsen et al., 2023), and give the electorate a clear vision for the future. The country was dissatisfied with the Westminster Conservative government well before the 2024 election was called, as seen in byelection results post 2019. Both main Westminster parties were afflicted by internal turbulence and division, and changed leaders several times. Indeed from 2015 there were five Conservative prime ministers, with Richi Sunak replacing Liz Truss in 2022; and the Labour party had four leaders, with Sir Keir Starmer replacing Jeremy Corbin in 2020 (Baldwin, 2024).

The 2024 Labour Manifesto, *Change*, presented a plan for 'mission-driven government with a focus on five pledges which included commitments to kickstart economic growth; make Britain a clean energy superpower; take back our streets; break down barriers to opportunity and build an NHS fit for the future' (Labour Party, 2024, pp. 12–13). But was the message understood by the electorate? And did the electorate identify an actionable plan in the manifesto? In the absence of a substantive programme for reform, the UK electorate voted for change, but the loss of half a million votes and 1.8 per cent increase in the vote share since 2019 suggests that there was little enthusiasm among voters (Baker et al., 2024). Indeed, had the Brexit Party not stood in so many constituencies, such a small share of the vote would not have led to such a large majority or even a majority at all. Perhaps the vote was against the ruling Conservatives, rather than a vote for change trusted to the Labour Party?

One manifesto pledge, to establish a Council of the Nations and Regions has been delivered with the inaugural meeting held on October 11th 2024 in Edinburgh (Labour Party, 2024). The idea of such a council appeared in the report of the Commission on the UK's future, chaired by Gordon Brown in 2022 (Brown, 2022). The Commission which met from 2021 to 2022 was supported by the Labour Party. The Report presented a vision of a reunited Britain, with a shared purpose, offering a fresh start, with proposals to 'create a virtuous circle ... spreading power and opportunity more equally through the country' (Brown, 2022, p. 2), in essence the recommendations include changes to governance, power and decision making. The inaugural meeting chaired by PM Starmer was (Prime Minister's Office, 2024), designed to be, 'a new and powerful institution to drive cooperation between all its governments' (Torrance, 2024). It is interesting to note that the title of the Brown Commission's report a New Britain is the same as Beveridge chose for one of his lectures in Oxford linked to his 1942 Report.

While dialogue across the four UK nations has improved in their first hundred days, and there are moves within England for a reset in relations between the voluntary and community sector and DCMS (Elliott, 2024), the Labour Government has exhibited a newfound commitment to balancing budgets rather than investing significant resources in transforming the economy as the Labour Government of 1945 did so effectively (Common Sense Policy Group, 2024). Such measures appear to be closer to the agenda of the Coalition Government of 2010–2015 than to any Labour Opposition since 2010 or, indeed, any Conservative Government since 2016. Various potential reasons for this reaffirmation of the very policies that accelerated the post Financial Crisis decline have been asserted, but erroneous belief in the political unpopularity and economic unfeasibility of interventionist approaches seem key (Johnson & Flinders 2024; Johnson, Johnson, et al., 2023; Stark et al., 2024).

We need to be clear that, regardless of the evidence offered, so long as entrenched financial interests are seen as fundamental to the success of parties in the first past the post system and that politicians are repeatedly told that there are no means of repeating successful policy interventions of the past, evidence capable of underpinning policies to achieve national renewal will be dismissed (Common Sense Policy Group, 2024). There is, though, a growing body of evidence, both, that politicians who fail to deliver on reducing financial insecurity are likely to do badly in elections (Bossert et al., 2023) and that only Beveridge-style state-led interventions are capable of delivering security that citizens need (Johnson, Johnson, et al., 2023). Believing that small-state fiscal conservatism is a neutral, non-ideological, technocratic position is simply unsustainable. The impact work of the group with Labour and Opposition MPs indicates that there is growing acceptance of this – a growing number of MPs no longer view fiscal conservatism as advancing their electoral interests.

Conclusion

In this article, we have examined the 1940s and the 2010s and beyond and the role of the social sciences in helping us understand the complex challenges confronting society, including evidence-based policy making. In 1945, and almost eight decades later in the summer of 2024 the UK electorate returned Labour governments to Westminster with large majorities. In this paper we have looked back to the 1940s to help understand contemporary problems (Ongaro, 2017), and we suggest that the challenges the UK faces today needs a plan with a similar vision to that of the Beveridge Report. The 1945 election campaign was inspired by the 1942 Beveridge Report (Beveridge, 1942) and centred on a plan for implementing it (Bartley, 2018), and crucially a plan the country understood and endorsed. As we have seen in this paper social scientists, including Attlee and Beveridge, who had a deep understanding of poverty, laid the foundations for evidence-based policy making. In his recent book Vernon Bogdanor (2024, pp. 203–204) reflected on Attlee's 1945 victory, and also pointed to the intellectual work of R H Tawney, GDH Cole and Harold Laski and members of the Fabian Society who prepared the ground for the victory.

We have seen that in more recent times that social scientists have examined the consequences of reduced public investment, rolling back the state in various policy areas affecting society, the consequence has been a large-scale worsening in each of

Beveridge's giant evils (Armstrong, 2017; Dorling, 2014; Taylor-Gooby et al., 2017; Toynbee & Walker, 2017, 2024; Wilkinson & Pickett, 2009). Inspired by social scientists of the 1940s in 2023, the Common Sense Policy Group has looked back to the 1942 Beveridge Report to help us look forward to developing actionable plans with the potential to become the policy reform of tomorrow (Johnson, Hardill, et al., 2023). Ours is not the only vision for re-imagining the UK, others include a vision for Positive Public Policy (PoPP) (Cairney et al., 2024), social scientists are hoping to stimulate debate, and demonstrate there could be a brighter future.

The Beveridge report had a central concern for securing determinants through a cradle-to-grave, a relatively easily accessible social security system, as well as a collectivised healthcare service. Perhaps welfare reform through a much less conditional Basic Income offers a way to address the causal role that resource scarcity, insecurity and unpredictability plays in public health (see Howard et al., 2024; Johnson, Webster, et al., 2024; Nettle et al., 2023; Reed et al., 2023, 2024; Westlake et al., 2024)? Achieving change is essential to restoring faith in politics (Johnson et al., 2022), and for a brighter and fairer future following the shared experiences of the COVID-19 pandemic.

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No primary data are available.

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