

# History: the 20<sup>th</sup> century since 1945



## The Labour Party and the Welfare State

1945-51

In 1945 the Labour Party, born in 1901, won the general elections and created the **Welfare State**: a system by which the government provided free social services and National Health Service for all citizens. Together with the US, the UK was a founder member of the **United Nations Organisation** (UNO) and of the **North Atlantic Treaty Organisation** (NATO).

1950s-1960s and early 1970s

**Elizabeth II** became queen in 1952 and there was euphoria at the beginning. In the 1960s new immigrants from the West Indies and India arrived in the country generating racism and hostility. In 1973 Britain joined the European Union.

## Thatcherism

1979-1990

The new Conservative Prime Minister **Margaret Thatcher** was in favour of the free market and denationalised industries to lower government spending. She was hostile to trade unions and destroyed the Welfare State. She was called the Iron Lady. In 1982 Britain was involved in an undeclared war with Argentina for the Falkland Islands and in 1991 it took part in the Gulf War.

## Tony Blair's first mandate

1997-2001

**Tony Blair**, leader of the Labour Party, improved the Welfare and the Education System, fought against crime and unemployment. He established a national minimum wage, devolved powers to Northern Ireland (1998), Scotland and Wales (1999). Tony Blair also solved the Irish question with the Good Friday 1998 peace agreement between Ireland and Northern Ireland.



## The post-war years and the Cold War

from 1945 to the 1950s

In the post-war period, the United States reached an unprecedented level of prosperity. **Henry Truman** Administration offered the **Marshall Plan** to help Europe rebuild its economy. In the 1950s, the **Cold War** between America and the Western World on one side and the Communist countries reached moments of tensions.

1960s

In 1961 the Democratic **John F. Kennedy** became the first Catholic president and also the youngest. In this period the Berlin Wall was built (1961) and the Cuban Missile Crisis (1962) took place. Kennedy was assassinated in Dallas in 1963. Also Martin Luther King, the leader of the non-violent movement for civil rights, was assassinated in 1968. In this period, America also became involved in the **Vietnam War** against communist North Vietnam.

**Nixon**  
1969-74  
and **Carter**  
1977-81

The Republican President **Richard Nixon** promised to put an end to the Vietnam War. The US withdrew its forces in 1973, but the war ended only in 1975. A few months after his re-election, Nixon was involved in the **Watergate Affair** and resigned in 1974. At the end of the Vietnam War, inflation was very high, and the Democratic President **Jimmy Carter** was unable to face the situation.

**Reagan**  
1981-89  
and **Bush Sr.**  
1988-93

With **Ronald Reagan**, the relationships with the Soviet Union improved. Reagan and the Soviet President Gorbachev met in Washington in 1987 to sign a treaty to ban land-missiles in Europe. The fall of the Berlin Wall in 1989 took place during George Bush Sr.'s presidency. In 1991 the US led a coalition against Saddam Hussein, the Iraqi dictator who had invaded Kuwait, in the Gulf War.

**Clinton**  
1993-2001

The Democratic **Bill Clinton** had a progressive plan of social reforms, job creation and reduction of public debt. America enjoyed a new period of growth and prosperity.



**1** Read these definitions of the Five Evil Giants of the Beveridge Report (1942) about the levels of poverty in the UK and match them with the right word.

disease ■ idleness ■ ignorance ■ squalor ■ want

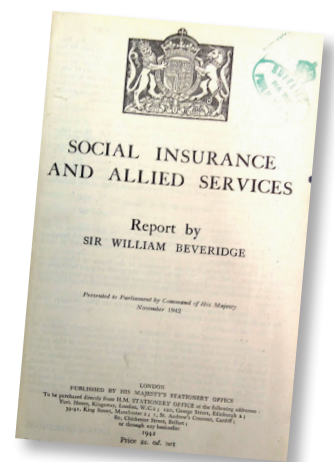
1. The majority of families lived in slums and house pricing went beyond people's income. ....
2. Unemployment levels had become high due to fewer educated people and not enough jobs left after the war. ....
3. Diseases were widespread and there was little help available from hospitals, and they were all private and required a fee which most people could not afford. ....
4. The school leaving age in the 1900s was just 14, which led to young people being unemployed and the majority could not afford to pay for higher education. ....
5. Extreme poverty was the result for many families who could not afford the necessities of everyday life. This was the outcome of ill health and unemployment, which meant household income was little. ....



**2** Watch the video on Sir Beveridge's plan for the birth of the Welfare State and answer the questions.

▶ [Sir William Beveridge talks to Pathe Gazette \(1942\) posted by British Pathé](#)

1. How many parts is Beveridge's plan made of?
2. What does social insurance provide?
3. What do people have to do in exchange for social insurance?
4. How should the benefit of social insurance be?
5. When are children allowances paid?
6. What does the third scheme provide?
7. What is the national minimum?
8. What can people do with income above the minimum?
9. What do we all desire according to Sir Beveridge?



**3** Dictation: listen to and write down the definition of Welfare State according to Sir Beveridge.



**4** Read an extract from Martin L. King's speech "I have a dream" and underline all the dreams that are mentioned. Then, look at the list of dreams with a partner. Which ones are still a dream today? Which ones have become realities? Refer to your personal knowledge and experience to answer the questions.



I have a dream that one day this nation will rise up and live out the true meaning of its creed: "We hold these truths to be self-evident, that all men are created equal."

I have a dream that one day on the red hills of Georgia, the sons of former slaves and the sons of former slave owners will be able to sit down together at the table of brotherhood.

I have a dream that one day even the state of Mississippi, a state sweltering with the heat of injustice, sweltering with the heat of oppression, will be transformed into an oasis of freedom and justice.

I have a dream that my four little children will one day live in a nation where they will not be judged by the color of their skin but by the content of their character.

I have a *dream* today!

I have a dream that one day, down in Alabama, with its vicious racists, with its governor having his lips dripping with the words of "interposition" and "nullification" – one day right there in Alabama little black boys and black girls will be able to join hands with little white boys and white girls as sisters and brothers.

I have a *dream* today!

I have a dream that one day every valley shall be exalted, and every hill and mountain shall be made low, the rough places will be made plain, and the crooked places will be made straight; "and the glory of the Lord shall be revealed and all flesh shall see it together."

This is our hope, and this is the faith that I go back to the South with.