Introduction - The experience of war between 1939 and 1945 had prepared the public for greater government intervention in their lives and had created a commonly held attitude that that there should be a ‘new’ Britain after the war. The Beveridge Report of 1942 emphasised the need to eradicate 5 evils from British life – **want, squalor, ignorance, idleness and disease.** The Welfare State was therefore meant to be the provision of comprehensive social services from the ‘cradle to the grave’, through a system of education, health, housing and social security. The Labour Government, which won a landslide election victory in 1945, is credited by some historians as having revolutionised the provision of support, especially given the economic problems after the war. However, others have suggested that Labour failed to provide a comprehensive or universal service to the people.

Factor 2 = **Disease**

Background – Ill-health was both the cause and result of poverty, but the poor could not afford to pay for medical treatment.

K – National Health Service Act. This established the idea of universal health care, free at the point of use. People could visit a doctor, hospital, dentist or optician without having to pay. It also nationalised hospitals so that there would be one standard of care.

A – For the first time, poverty was not a reason to not seek medical care. There was a huge take up of the new services e.g. 8 million dental patients in first year. This showed that the NHS was tackling problems that had not been treated under the old system. Money was also provided to modernise and improve hospitals across the country.

A – However, the cost of the NHS was enormous. It exceeded its budget by 40% in the first two years. The introduction of charges for false teeth and spectacles undermined the idea of free care.

A – Doctors were allowed to treat some patients privately. This meant that there was not a single standard of care across the country.

Evaluation – In many ways the NHS was a huge success as it provided universal medical care for the cradle to the grave. Birch – ‘the greatest single achievement of the story of the welfare state’.

However, it can be argued that the NHS was far too expensive at a time when Britain should have been investing more in its industry. Furthermore, the fact that certain treatments were not free damaged the fundamental idea of the NHS.

Factor 1 = **Want**

Background- The one area which affected all the other Giants was poverty.

K – National Insurance Act. In return for a weekly contribution, the Act provided sickness and unemployment benefit (26 shillings per week), old age pensions (42 shillings per week) and maternity grants.

A – Significant improvement as in theory it provided universal coverage from the cradle to the grave. It also improved the provision of pensions, as everyone was now entitled to one.

A – However, the weekly contributions took up 5% of average earnings, which some families couldn’t afford. Benefit and pension levels were set in 1946, but because of inflation, they were still not enough to live on. In addition, benefits were restricted to those who had made 156 weekly contributions, therefore it was not universal.

K – National Assistance Act. Provided safety net for those not covered by National Insurance. It provided weekly payments or one off payments in an emergency.

A – It meant that everyone was covered by some form of social security, and the needs test was less humiliating than the old means test. However, the fact that it was needed undermined the National Insurance Act.

K – Industrial Injuries Act. Compensation was paid by the government to workers who were injured at work.

A – All workers now entitled to benefits and no longer had the difficult task of proving to employers that injuries had been caused by work.

Evaluation – Labour had tackled what Rowntree had identified as the key causes of poverty (unemployment, sickness, old age) and removed the fear for many of falling into long term poverty. However, welfare benefits in 1948 were only 19% of the average industrial wage, which was not enough to completely pull people out of poverty.

Factor 4 = **Ignorance**

Background –Many poorer children had no education beyond primary level as families could not afford the fees that some secondary schools charged.

K – 1944 Education Act (passed by war time government). Raised school leaving age to 15 and made provision of school meals compulsory. It required everyone to receive free secondary education.

A – This was significant as it allowed people from all backgrounds to access secondary education. The provision of school meals and milk also helped to improve the health of poorer children. However, it was the work of the coalition government, and not the Labour government. In addition, families still put pressure on children to leave school and find employment.

K – Children had to sit a test at age 11 (12 in Scotland). This decided which type of school that they went to, a grammar or a secondary modern.

A- This proved to be a major stumbling block. By deciding a child’s educational route at age 11, it did not take into account children who progressed later. It also condemned pupils who failed the 11+ to low expectations and a lower standard of education as secondary moderns were not properly resourced. Middle class children were more likely to pass the 11+ as their parents could afford tutors.

Evaluation – Labour did help to administer the Education Act, and therefore helped to ensure that all pupils had access to primary and secondary schooling. However, they did not ensure that access to education was equal. Pugh ‘’the reforms failed to eliminate private education, which continued to offer advantages to the wealthy’.

Factor 3 = **Squalor**

Background – Most of Britain’s cities still had slum areas and overcrowding. This was made worse by bomb damage during World War 2.

K – The government aimed to provide 200,000 houses per year. Most of these were pre-fabricated and were to be owned and rented out by councils.

A – Labour were able to build over 1 million homes by 1951, a real achievement given the shortages after the war. These homes were better than the slum housing that had existed before, with features such as running hot water, electricity and indoor toilets. Rents were also lower as council houses protected tenants from exploitative private landlords.

A- However, there was still a severe lack of housing, with 750,000 fewer houses than households by 1951. As a result, many families were forced to squat in places such as disused army camps. Furthermore, it can be argued that the new council estates lacked sufficient facilities such as shops.

K – New Towns Act. Created 14 new towns such as Glenrothes and East Kilbride. These towns were designed to be well planned and pleasant to live in.

A – These towns did provide good quality housing, and attracted some industry. However, these towns often lacked public facilities and jobs. Most people were forced to commute to find work.

Evaluation – Labour’s record on housing can be criticised as levels of homelessness in 1951 were higher than they had been in 1931. The government also failed to build the number of houses it had promised.

However, it can be argued that Labour faced enormous problems such as a shortage of raw materials, and a huge growth in the birth rate. Under these circumstances Labour provided quality, affordable housing for a large number of people.

Potential Questions

“The social reforms of the Labour Government of 1945–1951 failed to deal effectively with the needs of the people.” How valid is this view?

“The Labour Government of 1945 to 1951 met the needs of the people ‘from the cradle to the grave’.” How valid is this view?

Conclusion

Try to split your conclusion into two sections, which should mirror the argument that you have mentioned in your introduction. The second section should be the viewpoint that you agree with. Make sure that you refer back to the question and answer it. Try to differentiate between areas that Labour tackled effectively, from areas which were not handled so well.

Key Viewpoints

The reforms were introduced at a very difficult time for the country, many of the reforms had limitations, and they did not by any means cure all the problems of poverty - particularly housing.

However, they did introduce a very wide- ranging series of reforms which were dramatic in their scope and benefit - especially the NHS which had a huge effect on the health of the people.

**“It was the most effective of any British Government since the passage of the 1832 Reform Act.”**

*K. Morgan*

Factor 5 = **Idleness**

Background – Unemployment was an obvious cause of poverty. The Labour government aimed to achieve full employment so that every person had a job.

K – Labour nationalised several industries, such as coal, railways and electricity. This meant that government ran them instead of private companies.

A – By focussing on providing services and employment, rather than concentrating on profits, Labour was able to reduce unemployment to a very low level (2.5%). Because industries were backed by government, workers did not have to fear for their jobs.

A- However, nationalisation did not improve wages or working conditions for all workers. It also led to Britain’s industries becoming uncompetitive and therefore created problems in the long-term. It can also be argued that many jobs were created by private investment and that the government should not take credit for the low unemployment rate.

K – Labour introduced grants (payments) to help to pay for working class students to go to university. There was a 60% growth in the number of students during Labour’s time in government.

A – This can be considered a positive step as it allowed some families to access higher education for the first time. It also provided skilled workers for the economy.

Evaluation – Labour did oversee a period of low unemployment, and increased job security through nationalisation. This is impressive given the economic difficulties caused by the war. However, Addison argues that ‘full employment was the result of...the growth in private investment after 1945’.