

Child Labour and Factory Legislation

Untill the first quarter of the 19th century aim of the social policy in England had been to suppress the laboring class in the interest of the landowners, the manufacturers and the tradesmen poor children were sold for work to farmers , craftsmen or engaged in hard work in alms houses. The development of textile mills created opportunity to use the poor children who were placed to the manufacturers as cheap laborers. There was no limitation of their working hours. The working place in mills lacked fresh air, sunshine etc. The first initiative to protect the children against this cruel treatment came from Robert Peel who raised objection to the use of young children in labor camps and textile mills. “Health and Morals act of 1802” restricted the working hours of the poor children to 12 hours a day and forbade night work for children. To save the children hired directly from their parents, the parliament enacted the “Factory Act of 1833” which forbade the employment of children below nine in the textile mills and limited daily working hours for children.

The Poor Law Commission of 1905

In the first quarter of the 20th century the English people faced serious threat of unemployment. The Liberal Party, in 1905, promised to make a reform of the poor laws. It appointed a Royal Commission on the poor laws and relief of distress. After the recommendations by commission some acts were enacted.

- The Provisions of Meals Act of 1906 organized free school lunches for children in elementary schools.
- The Education Act of 1907 included provision for medical examination of school going children.
- The Old-age Pension's Act of 1908 provided for a weekly pension of five shilling for deriving poor persons above 70 years of age.
- The Un-employment Work Men Act of 1908 for the employment of poor.

Development Since 1909

Until 1909, almost all the poor laws of England had been mainly concerned with preventive measures. But from 1909 onward, the poor laws of England become more concerned with curative and rehabilitative measures. In the year 1911, National Insurance Act was enacted which provided compulsory health insurance for workers of modest income. This program was financed by contributions of the insured employees and their employers and also by grants from the parliament. The Social Insurance Program of England was further extended in 1925 by the introduction of the “Widows; Orphan and Old-age Contributory Pensions Act” which applied to men over sixty five, women over sixty and to widows, orphans below 14.

Beveridge Report

The structure of the present social security program of England is based on a Report presented by sir William Beveridge on November 20, 1942. During the critical days of the war in June 1941, the country began to make a revolutionary reform of her social welfare program with the support of parliament. An Interdepartmental Committee on Social Insurance and Allied Services was organized under the chairmanship of William Beveridge.

The Beveridge report gave the following proposals for introducing a comprehensive social security program in England.

- A unified, comprehensive and adequate program of social insurance
- Public assistance as a national program for aiding people who were not sufficiently protected through social insurance.
- Children’s allowance (now called family allowance) to provide a weekly benefit for each child
- Comprehensive free health and rehabilitative services for the entire population
- The maintenance of full employment through public works in order to prevent mass unemployment in economic crises

The Beveridge Report aimed at protecting the entire population from want, ignorance, sickness and unemployment. The report emphasized the following basic principles for a unified plan of social security in England.

- Unified administration

- Comprehensive coverage
- Flat rate of contribution
- Flat rate of benefits
- Adequacy of all benefits to meet the basic needs of the recipients
- Classification of the population

The present social services in England include.

Family Allowances:

The system provides eight shillings a week for every child.

National Health Service:

It provides without charge, medical, hospital and dental services for every man, woman and child.

National Assistance:

This scheme provide for those who for one reason or other are not fully covered by insurance.

National Insurance:

It is an insurance scheme in which regular contributions are paid towards the cost of benefits payable in particular contingencies. Contributions are paid according to the class of contributions and the benefit available to that class.