

Economic Depression and Recovering from the Trauma of the World War: The Social Reconstruction of Britain after World War II

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Abstract: The passage focuses on the reconstruction of Britain after World War II. The background of the research was the time period after WWII. In order to analyze the situation more precisely, the background information of the research had a time span from the 1920s to approximately the 1950s, starting from the Roaring Twenties to the publication of the Green Belt Policy. The passage focuses on the reorganization of cities and the reconstruction of the welfare system. The two examples listed in the following passage are the Green Belt Policy and the NHS, which represents the reconstruction of cities in England and the reconstruction of the welfare system of England. Other examples include data recorded in 1931 and several government documents by the British government. By answering the question of the advantages of Britain in the reconstruction of World War II, the passage hopes to provide some characteristics of the successful reconstruction of Britain to help reconstruction in other countries like Palestine.

Keywords: Postwar Reconstruction, Britain, Welfare System, City Structures

1. Introduction

The historical experience of the Second World War is a valuable asset for humankind [1], and the study of World War II, research of reconstruction of England after World War II has been studied from many perspectives, including learning how England managed to reconstruct its cities after World War II); “The Tourist Trap: Great Britain, Postwar Recovery, and the Marshall Plan” Grant, Mariel analyzed how England recover from the war using Marshall Plan’s support and its downsides for England. However, essays studying the overall social reconstruction of England were seldom seen. [2] The report aims to conclude and examine the comprehensive social rebuilding of England after World War II. This research is essential because “Small-scale, non-conventional wars—involving groups most easily identified by language, religion, or place rather than nationality—have blossomed since the Cold War in a global renaissance of civil conflict. ” (Post-war Reconstruction: Concerns, Models, and Approaches (rwu.edu)). Especially when the U.S. decided to use the powers once used to fight the Soviets on China and Russia, a new kind of “Cold War” trend seemed to emerge during the combats between the three super countries, post-War reconstruction, though been studied many times, remains unclear for most people due to the peaceful environment for over 40 years.

War, Reconstruction, and the Nationalization of Britain, 1939–1951: The book delves into the immense challenges faced by Britain in rebuilding itself after the war. The conflict had left the country devastated, both physically and economically. Cities were ruined, industries were severely damaged, and the social welfare system was daunted. The task needs to be finished within a short period of time, which requires the determination of government workers.

The social memory of the Great Depression also profoundly affected British society before and after the Second World War [3]. The study mainly focuses on the reconstruction of the physical infrastructure of cities and social welfare. Firstly, the passage mainly focuses on the rebuilding of cities and towns that had suffered extensive damage during the bombings. The government posed ambitious plans on reconstructing housing, factories, and public facilities which aims to restore economics and improve living conditions for citizens.

Then, the study shifts its focus to economics, including trading networks, factories, and various industries. The government announced plans for housing reconstruction and infrastructure. Because of these plans, citizens around the area had more job opportunities due to the emergent need for workers to finish reconstructions promised on time. As for investments, the government announced policies that attracted abroad investment, which provided injections to the local economy. These policies and rebuilding had laid a stable foundation for the future economics of England.

Edgerton, David provides a comprehensive analysis of the reconstruction process in post-war Britain. It highlights the challenges and strategies employed to rebuild the nation physically, economically, and socially. [4] The book explores the impact of reconstruction on the lives of individuals, the transformation of industries, and the broader political implications. The study offers valuable insights into the remarkable efforts that reshaped Britain during a critical transitional period by focusing on this theme.

This research noticed that England's effort in constructing the society mainly focused on social welfare for citizens and the reconstruction of ruined cities, as most cities in England were damaged by German bombs. Understanding the various economic policies implemented in Britain during this period will help us to understand the key reasons for the slow economic development of Britain during this period [5].

2. The Great Depression and its Influence

To inform the reader more about WWII's background and also list the welfare reconstruction before WWII, let us take a look at the Great Depression. The Great Depression was a significant economic crisis that occurred from 1929 to the late 1930s, primarily affecting countries in North America, Europe, and other industrialized parts of the world. A severe and long-lasting economic downturn, rising unemployment rates, widespread poverty, declining industrial output, and significant drops in asset prices characterize it.

The Great Depression originated in the US when the US stock market collapsed in October 1929 and quickly spread across the world. The problem was, in simple terms, the result of overproduction and an economic bubble created by the stock market in the US. Because of the global interdependence of economics of the world after WWI, the crisis spread rapidly and caused severe consequences all over the world. The decisive constraints on the Labour Government's planning of post-war recovery were in large part external, emerging out of the framework of Western European economic cooperation. [6]

The crisis was so severed that governments needed to interfere with the country's economy, which led to the reform of the economic structure. In conclusion, the Great Depression is one of the most significant economic events of the 20th century that affected the world politically, economically, and socially.

In order to contrast the severity of the Great Depression, here are some data and information about the effects of the Great Depression on England.

Before the Great Depression, the economy was in good condition: people enjoyed the benefits brought by the increased wages and improved living standards; technological advancements made people's lives better and increased their productivity. People were willing to consume instead of keeping their money. The economy was a positive feedback loop.

The Great Depression, however, totally changed the situation. People started to get unemployed; businesses started to close down etc. The Great Depression had a huge negative effect on people's lives.

The Great Depression affected everyone in England. Unemployment skyrocketed, reaching record levels of over 3 million people by 1932 [7]. All industries were affected. The ones that were influenced most experienced a significant decrease in production up to around 50%.

Before the Great Depression, the unemployment rate in England was relatively low, hovering around 7% in the late 1920s [7]. However, during the Great Depression, unemployment increased by 16% by the early 1930s. The country was affected by the high unemployment rate throughout the 1930s, with rates remaining above 10% until the outbreak of World War II [7].

Historians concluded the main influences on English citizens into several perspectives, and they are listed below in detail:

Unemployment: Because of the closure of various industries, people lost their work and needed the country to fund them in order to live through the hard times. This increased government expenditure and decreased the happiness of people in England.

Poverty and Hardship: Because people lost their jobs, many had no income. Thus, they did not have enough money to sustain their housing and feeding expenditures. All they can rely on is the funding of governments. However, the funding of governments was not sufficient, so most families needed to move into suburban areas or places with horrible security and environment.

The decline in Standards of Living: The economic downturn significantly impacted people's living standards. Many households had to tighten their belts and cut back on necessities [7]. Because there was not enough money to buy once affordable things, people started to buy inferior goods. Their standards of living declined as they started to use low-quality goods.

Government Intervention: The Great Depression made governments have to interfere with the country's economy. Many policies were announced to confront the situation, including providing work opportunities by funding infrastructure-building. Although there may be differences in the consequences due to the other social statuses among different individuals, these consequences were concluded due to the common traits most people experienced.

The effects of the Great Depression are adverse and significant [7]. During the 1920s, Britain had been one of the world's leading economies, but the global economic downturn led to a severe decline in trade and a sharp reduction in demand for British goods. As the demand for British goods decreased, the gross domestic product of Britain continued to decline, which reflects the situation of Britain's economy was in bad condition.

3. The Effects of WWII on Britain

World War II had a profound and destructive impact on England, particularly its welfare system and cities. The war brought significant harm to England, including the death of ordinary citizens and the destruction of British territory.

Before the war, England had a well-established welfare system to help citizens pass their hard times. However, the war made the demand for social security, mainly health care, increase significantly.

The first area that was affected most was housing. German bombs had caused many homes to be destroyed, leaving many people homeless. Those who were lucky lived in overcrowded conditions, but the unlucky ones became homeless after the war. Because of the essential constructions of facilities used to defend against German bombs, the original places of some citizens' homes were used to construct defensive structures.

Moreover, many ruins were recycled and used as raw materials in plenty of war-related industries. This situation left countless families with a hard time finding suitable housing. Most people had to live in houses the government built up within a short period of time, which was not a comfortable place to live in.

In addition to housing, the war negatively affected social security programs. Because of the war, the country had a limited budget for rebuilding the social welfare system. For example, many individuals lost their jobs during the period of war. However, the government cannot provide them with help because the government had their budget used for reconstructing the cities and infrastructures.

The problems caused by the German bombs were far more than the physical destruction. During the raid, many hospitals, clinics, schools, and libraries were destroyed. The destruction of hospitals and clinics made it almost impossible for the government to provide citizens with health care services within a short period of time. The destruction of schools made the government to reconstruct the educational system. These factors were part of the reason that England focused mainly on social welfare system reconstruction because if a country cannot keep its citizens happy, it will corrupt quickly.

As for citizens, the bombing also caused a portion of them to have mental issues. The fear and anxiety that permeated daily life during the war persisted long after the conflict ended, impacting the mental well-being of individuals and communities.

4. The Green Belt Policy and the NHS

To help England recover from the devastation of WWII, the English government proposed many policies, mainly focusing on welfare policies and the reconstruction of cities. The English government partly saw the reconstruction as a chance to reorganize the structure of certain towns and an opportunity to set up a more well-developed welfare system. The rest of this part will introduce two policies. One example this research would like to list in city reconstruction is the Green Belt Policy in London, proposed in 1944, almost when World War II ended. The Green Belt policy (A Plan for London/ Greater London Plan) was first proposed by the Greater London Regional Planning Committee (GLRPC), chaired by Sir Patrick Abercrombie, a well-known town planner, architect, and geographer.

The GLRPC was formed in 1933 and played a significant role in shaping post-war urban planning in London. In 1944, the Abercrombie Plan, officially titled "A Plan for London," was published. It served as the basis for the Green Belt policy proposal. The plan aimed to address the issues of overcrowding, housing shortages, and the need for redeveloping war-damaged areas. The Green Belt policy was a vital component of this comprehensive plan.

The proposal for the Green Belt policy received support from various stakeholders, including town planners, environmentalists, and policymakers concerned about preserving the natural and historic qualities of the city. The procedure was eventually agreed upon by the government and local authorities. (Greater London Plan - Wikipedia). Here is a link for readers to learn more about the Greater London Plan and the structural changes it brought to London [8].

The critical elements of the Green Belt Plan include restricting development, protecting agricultural land, conserving the natural environment, keeping the environment substantial, preserving heritages, planning collaboration, and reviewing and monitoring. The benefits of the Green

Belt policy for the people of London are numerous and have continued till the present day, including the following benefits:

Preservation of Open Spaces: The Green Belt Policy enabled the government to protect the open space from rapid urbanization development. It helped preserve open spaces, farmland, woodlands, and parks, providing Londoners with accessible areas for recreation, leisure, and nature appreciation [9].

Protection of Rural Character: The policy protected the scarce rural views in the city, which also protected the Green Belt in the city. It ensured the preservation of green corridors, rivers, and critical wildlife habitats, which not only made the city more beautiful but also provided a city with a sense of being “environmentally friendly”.

Recreational Opportunities: The Green Belt provided opportunities for citizens to take walks and relax in the natural environment. It helps promote physical and mental well-being and contributes to a higher quality of life.

Reducing Urban Sprawl: The Green Belt policy restricted the urban sprawl and protected the rural areas. It has encouraged more sustainable and compact city growth, emphasizing the regeneration of existing urban areas [10].

Cultural Heritage Conservation: The Green Belt policy protects historic buildings, landmarks, and rural villages, preserving the cultural heritage of the surrounding areas. This contributes to a sense of place and identity for Londoners and attracts tourism. The main focus of the English government on the reconstruction of society was welfare and city reconstruction. The texts above showed the English government’s effort in city reconstruction but did not introduce the welfare part. The following policy will raise the English government's efforts to improve the welfare system.

This research will introduce the National Health Service, also an institution in England currently. (NHS services - NHS (www.nhs.uk)) The National Health Service (NHS) is one of the most renowned welfare policies in history and has tremendously impacted the lives of citizens in England post-WWII.

The NHS was proposed by Aneurin Bevan, a Welsh Labour Party politician, as part of the post-war reconstruction effort. Bevan wanted to provide free healthcare services for every citizen in England. The policy was implemented on July 5, 1948, and has since been critical in improving public health nationwide.

The NHS is a universal healthcare system in England that provides free medical treatment to all residents. Under the NHS, patients can receive medical care for various conditions, ranging from routine check-ups and vaccinations to significant surgeries and chronic illnesses. The system is based on the principle of equity, to provide everyone the same standard of care, regardless of their socioeconomic background. This means that everyone in England has access to healthcare services that are of high quality and free of charge.

The implementation of the NHS has been a pivotal moment in England's history, especially for low-income families with limited access to medical treatment [10]. Before the NHS, many poor people could not enjoy the same care as the rich. After the NHS, however, people of all social statuses enjoy the same medical care regardless of their wealth. The policy saved many poor English citizens from diseases that were once too expensive for ordinary people to cure.

The NHS is funded through general taxation, which allows it to provide free healthcare services for all residents. This funding structure means that healthcare services are not dependent on an individual's ability to pay. In other words, the expense you needed to cure your disease was paid by all residents of England. The paying structure makes sure that any citizen who uses NHS is equal in expenses of curing disease and prevents the problem of inequality in hospitals.

The NHS has had a significant impact on English society since its inception. It has reduced mortality rates, improved health outcomes, and contributed to an overall increase in life expectancy. This has been primarily due to the accessibility of healthcare services provided by the NHS, which

has resulted in early detection and treatment of health conditions that may have otherwise gone unnoticed. The impact of the NHS can also be seen in its contribution to reducing health disparities between different population segments [10]. Although the NHS faces challenges, including the increasing demand for healthcare services due to an aging population, the organization still devotes much effort to maintaining its work. The benefit immensely helped citizens in England and reduced the mortality caused by diseases.

5. Conclusions

Reviewing the passage, the author first stated the importance of post-war reconstruction and concluded that England's example after WWII was significant. The second thing the author mentioned is the Great Depression, the leading cause of WWII and the main reason that made it harder to recover from WWII. The author contrasted life before and during the Great Depression and briefly analyzed the economic situation in England during the Great Depression. The essay's third part introduces the harm and devastation WWII brought to England, including vast areas from housing to minerals. Lastly, the author used two policies to show a brief image of the English government's efforts in post-war reconstruction.

Of course, the English government's efforts are not limited to the two policies the author has mentioned. Many plans are still made to soothe the situation, including the Marshall Plan, the Welfare State, and the Education Act. These policies also made up a significant part of the post-WWII reconstruction of England. In conclusion, the rebuilding of Britain's welfare system and city structure succeeded. The Green Belt Policy and the National Health Service significantly improved the lives of English citizens. Most of England's efforts have proved to soothe the harsh situation after WWII.

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