

## Candidate 1 evidence

“War was a locomotive of social change.” To what extent is this true of the Second World War in Britain?

## Introduction

*“For five years of war the pressure for a higher standard of welfare and a deeper comprehension of social justice steadily gained in strength ... the mood of the people had changed.”*<sup>1</sup> Titmuss is among historians with a staunchly ‘traditional’ view as to how WWII impacted on society. Alongside historians such as Marwick, Titmuss presents his argument of a new social awareness in the people of Britain due to total war; when times were bleakest after Dunkirk, and during the Blitz, there was national cohesion and sense of unity under a common enemy. Such a traditional argument stresses how the war highlighted issues of class. The affluent witnessed first-hand the poverty of inner cities through evacuees and shared shelters. It can be held women saw their lives changed, entering heavy industry and abandoning etiquette to behave more freely. Furthermore, a ‘swing to the left’ is often examined as a result of the war, as people recognised the benefits of government aid in daily life, leading to Labour’s landslide victory and, in turn, the welfare state which continues to influence today’s society. However, to say that WWII was ‘a Good War’, as coined by A.J.P. Taylor<sup>2</sup>, and led to complete social reformation, would be a failure to recognise the issues that remained. Indeed, it can be said that many of the effects of war on society were a transitory change, particularly within class and gender, and revisionist arguments made by the likes of H.L. Smith create debate on how far society was changed, distanced from the romanticism often held by historians with memory of the war. And yet, war irrefutably acted as a locomotive of some social change, so it must be the

---

<sup>1</sup> TITMUSS, R - *Problems of Social Policy*, pg. 508

<sup>2</sup> TAYLOR, A.J.P. – *English History 1914-1945*

Page Word Count: 282 Accumulative Word Count: 282
--

success and longevity of these changes to be assessed, in the three important segments of a society: women, class, and government policies.

Page Word Count: 21  
Accumulative Word Count: 303

### Class

Orwell wrote, "*Quite possibly our present evils, even including war, will disappear like leprosy and bubonic plague*"<sup>3</sup> Indeed, many evils existed in 1940s society, none perhaps as prevalent as the class divide, but whether they'd disappear was doubtful. As bombs ravaged cities, it is often argued a national cohesion occurred. With rationing and evacuation in place to control the effects of the war, state intervention was highlighting the differences between Britain's deprived and most affluent.

'The myth of the Blitz' conjures images of "*gallant Cockneys joking at adversity*".<sup>4</sup> Some historians follow Calder's viewpoint: myths are founded in truths. A belief that 'bombs do not discriminate' supposedly created national cohesion. Large shelters like Tilbury meant strangers of mixed class, gender, and ethnicity came together in unarguably traumatic times, "*an enormous social achievement*,"<sup>5</sup> acting as a locomotive of social change through raising consciousness about the deprivation of the poorer in society, urging people to demand reforms from authorities. However, whilst there are some accounts of unity, it is difficult say there was national cohesion. Locally, it was a 'social achievement', communities of a few streets ensuring the homeless were fed and clothed. Nationally, this was less likely, especially when only 9% of the population used public shelters, and over half were willing to risk staying in bed. Furthermore, when an East Londoners home had been destroyed, so too was Buckingham

---

<sup>3</sup> George Orwell, as quoted by JOSHUA LEVINE — *The Secret History of the Blitz*, pg. 3

<sup>4</sup> ZIEGLER, P. — *London At War 1939-1945*, pg. 163

<sup>5</sup> HARRISSON, T. — *Living Through the Blitz*

Page Word Count: 227

Accumulative Word Count: 530

Palace. Ironically, it had been their swimming pool, and the King's life remained untouched. Whilst anyone could be hit, the richer had a chance of avoiding it. Indeed, war often provided the means of social change, but was hampered as the richest could afford luxury hotel shelters, avoiding the experiences of lower classes. WWII showed these differences, arguably creating a rift between those who had and those who had not, working adversely to social change. The class divide through war was clearly shown, resentment and distancing between the classes occurred. "*Looting and wanton destruction had reached alarming proportions*"<sup>6</sup> and therefore, "*the rise in wartime crime and juvenile delinquency rates seems inconsistent with the notion of increased social solidarity.*"<sup>7</sup> Society was not as one, as accounts taken with rose-tinted spectacles suggest. Significant change was not seen, even an exacerbation of pre-existing issues during the Blitz occurred.

Around 4 million city dwellers were relocated to rural areas as part of the evacuation process. Lice, malnutrition, bed wetting were all amongst complaints and horror of host families. War had forced the wealthier to acknowledge these issues and, once it affected them too, an outcry for conditions to be improved occurred. A common enemy was now not only Hitler, but the poverty brought into homes across Britain too. Evacuation had new policies accompanying it. Free school meals and milk helped the poorer, allowing for them to keep up with their wealthier peers with better concentration, a chance not many had in city schools. Improving education is widely considered a form of social change, and WWII allowed urban children a

---

<sup>6</sup> DONNELLY, M. — *Britain in the Second World War*

<sup>7</sup> SMITH, H.L. - *Britain in the Second World War, A Social History*, pg.16

Page Word Count: 265 Accumulative Word Count: 795
--

whole new world of schooling. Importantly, this continued after the war, its longevity and popularity a show of social change. However, Calder picks up on the problems of evacuation: "*social mismatching was inherent*"<sup>8</sup> arguing this caused many failures and reduced impact on social change. The classes did not mix well. Evacuation worked better when the evacuees were matched with people of their own class. Calder talks of children relieving themselves on carpets of their temporary homes. Some would say "*evacuation served to open the eyes of Middle England to the conditions of life in Britain's slums — slums long overdue demolition*"<sup>9</sup> The concept of not having things as simple as an indoor lavatory seemed foreign to the upper classes, and the revelation sparked disgust and arguments for compensation of damaged property rather than improving living standards for their evacuees when they returned home. There was a "*deepening class antagonism*"<sup>10</sup> evident in the increase of outrage over city conditions that war had created.

"*Fair and effective rationing of food and clothing was a prime domestic achievement of the wartime government.*"<sup>11</sup> Promoting egalitarianism and ensuring the neediest had the basics was a great social success made by the war. Rationing was a direct response to poverty of those made homeless by the bombing and with main bread winners abroad fighting, an obvious effect of war ushering social change. Free or subsidised milk and vitamin supplements allowed for the most vulnerable like children and pregnant women, to improve their health. This

---

<sup>8</sup> CALDER, A. – *The People's War*

<sup>9</sup> WALLER, M. – *A Family In Wartime*, pg. 68

<sup>10</sup> DONNELLY, M – *Britain in the Second World War*, pg. 52

<sup>11</sup> MARR, A. – *A History of Modern Britain*, pg. 12

Page Word Count: 246

Accumulative Word Count: 1,041

lessened the association between health and wealth at a time before a welfare state. This was an extremely successful form of social change caused by circumstances of war. Nevertheless, *“respectable people, who would otherwise not admit to breaking the law, are quite happy to discuss black market dabbles.”*<sup>12</sup> The rich would always remain better off. Shopkeepers could often be persuaded to sell food ‘on the sly’ without coupons if the customer could pay. The war had not changed the fact that money could still buy extra security, nothing was put in place to effectively prevent this in wartime. And so, rationing did have its flaws, yet it proved to be successful at elevating the poorest by a little, and opening peacetime government and public’s eyes of the success of state intervention to reduce future social and class inequalities in Britain.

Social habits and behaviour did change under the unusual war circumstances. The Blitz perhaps united people under a common cause, but to argue that social change was driven because of the new understanding of the plight of those bombed is an overstatement. It can be strongly argued that class awareness, however, was heightened. Through this, war was able to accelerate social changes made by a government who could no longer ignore obvious inequalities. Rationing was a system which proved physically beneficial, providing better health than society had before the war. Finally, evacuation did spread national awareness of the poor conditions in the cities, but seemed to raise more disgust than uprising to demand change. Social change was occurring as the government had to step in and give aid, but its success was of course limited, as was the support for change in the public.

---

<sup>12</sup> LEVINE, J. – *The Secret History of the Blitz*

Page Word Count: 283  
Accumulative Word Count: 1,324

### Women

A woman's place in society had long been in a domestic role. A mere 6 million were employed, predominantly in textiles or domestic service. Out of these workers, just 16% were married. The marriage bar ensured that women gave up working as soon as they married. Women were unskilled and unequal to men; the 1935 wage an average of 47% of men's. Traditional historians argue the war allowed women to improve their social status with new jobs and freedom in relationships, whereas revisionists like Smith believe this is exaggerated.

With the outbreak of war, women were required to hang up their kitchen aprons to don a uniform - "*widely seen as a form of emancipation in itself*"<sup>13</sup> according to Pugh - and the number of women working in engineering or with chemicals doubled, making up one 1/3 of the overall workforce in these sectors. In 1939, women made up 10% of engineers. By 1943, this increased to 34% and dipped only to 33% in 1950. Marwick argues this is war acting as a locomotive of social change for women as it is a long term increase for them in exclusively male industries. The work of Bevin, Minister of Labour, allowed for 1.5 million women to find employment in essential war industries. Their social status was altered, those not working seen as 'shirkers', whereas before 1939, working women were considered 'unsettled'. Yet Calder calls women finding themselves in masculine industries an "*exaggeration of peacetime trends*"<sup>14</sup>. Women in sectors like aircraft manufacturing had already been established. Social

---

<sup>13</sup> PUGH, M. – *State and Society*

<sup>14</sup> CALDER, A. – *The People's War*, pg. 331

Page Word Count: 255

Accumulative Word Count: 1,579

change was not apparent when nearly 2 million women left their jobs by 1947. Nevertheless, women's self-esteem and how they valued themselves as members of society were widely changed. The social change for women in men's workplaces was made as a lasting impression. Those who discovered a newfound confidence would not be as likely to revert back. Individual social impact created by extraordinary work carried out throughout WWII would stay with many women, a real achievement for social change.

It is contended by some that the opportunities arising in the workplace benefitted the married in particular. The marriage bar was suspended in wartime, and wives in the workforce grew by 27%, a figure which is used by Marwick as evidence of a waning prejudice in society against women in professions. Most women whose husbands were at war worked voluntarily, their wages vital to family upkeep. Therefore, the new socio-economic independence for a married woman was perhaps out of necessity to run her home, rather than taking opportunities war provided. This reinforces how the changes war made did not affect lives drastically. The restrictive marriage bar on women was only abolished for civil servants and teachers — women could work, but it would be in roles that complimented their preordained position in society as care-givers and at desk jobs. As Morgan and Evans argue, "*the mythical armies of wartime women workers do not exist outside fantasy*"<sup>15</sup>. Had Britain been awash with housewives making their way to essential industries, conscription would not have been necessary. 8.7 million housewives to 7.3 million women workers existed, and only 13% of women with

---

<sup>15</sup> EVANS, M.; MORGAN, D. – *The Battle for Britain: citizenship and ideology in the Second World War*

Page Word Count: 267  
Accumulative Word Count: 1,846

children under the age of fourteen became employed. The 'double burden' came into existence. War had created a new expectation of women: they would be independent workers as well as a wife and mother. "*Women pointed out that if they went to work, there would be war at home*"<sup>16</sup>, contended by Hylton. The reluctance found in many would suggest that whilst some women found work a release, many saw it a push too far, to challenge gender roles would damage family life. And so, the extent to which war acted as a locomotive for change to women and work was transitory, measures like conscription forcing some to leave their homes to distribute workers were only for the war. Whilst some felt a change in themselves as members of society, this was not unanimous, as some wanted family life untouched. As a Mass Observation noted,  $\frac{3}{4}$  wanted to go back to their families and abandon their new jobs as soon as the war was over.

With an increase of women in work, they had more 'money in their pockets'. For younger women, this was money to spend having a greater freedom. WWII saw a change in women's behaviour and their values. The arrival of American GIs in Britain saw young women start brief relationships as the war kept them from the rule of dominating male figures in their lives. As a result, illegitimacy rates doubled to 9%. "*Middle-aged men were alarmist in interpreting all this as a collapse of traditional moral values.*"<sup>17</sup> Society had not changed, but women had. The 'good time girls', young women looking for fun, was a form of social change driven by refusing to be put down by hardships of war and increasing confidence in women. On the other hand,

---

<sup>16</sup> HYLTON, S. – *Their Darkest Hour*, pg. 207

<sup>17</sup> PUGH, M. – *State and Society*, pg. 258

Page Word Count: 293

Accumulative Word Count: 2,139

once the war was over, marriage rates soared. Before WWII, 326,000 marriages took place a year, and by 1947, this figure was 401,000. Nearly 3 out of 10 'war brides' were under 21, and women who had shown disregard for convention during the war looked to become respectable. Having a family remained a top priority for women in society, showing that the change to women in society was limited. Whilst returning to traditional values seems to prove war did not push social change far, women did expect more in the home. Divorce rates grew to 59,000 in 1947 - 10 times the pre-war average - as women sought a "companionate marriage". Legislation in the 1950s allowed women to divorce men on grounds of cruelty or desertion was seen as a positive change for women. 58% of post-war divorces were sought by men, arguably coming home to women who saw themselves as equals, an example of them gaining in confidence and driving social change.

Equal pay remained an issue for women. Hylton believes "*the government itself had no intention of interfering with the time-honoured practice of sex discrimination in the workplace*"<sup>18</sup> Women were often exploited, branded as unskilled and needing supervision, so employers could pay them an inferior wage. The pay gap after the war had only lessened by an insignificant 5%. Notably, the policies put in place did not extend to peacetime. Women were largely hindered in developing their careers should they so choose, as men were guaranteed priority for returning to work. The necessity for women war work, did not change the government's attitude to women in society. The government's 'Beauty is Duty' campaign

---

<sup>18</sup> HYLTON, S. – *Their Darkest Hour*, pg. 209

Page Word Count: 275  
Accumulative Word Count: 2,414

ensured beauty products were not rationed for women working in masculine sectors. Women were still expected by politicians to live up to beauty standards to placate men frustrated at women's new involvement in industry; fearing they would appear too masculine and divert from their role at home. Often, the Family Allowance benefit is credited as the government recognising women's ability to control finance, by giving them the payment rather than the father. But this was not paid for the first child. Again, government policy placed women back firmly in home life, expecting them to have more children and care for them, putting aside any aspirations found when enjoying a new social life and career.

And so, this interpretation would agree with that of revisionists; the strengths were war acted as a locomotive change for women lie in women's own confidence, something immeasurable and vastly varying. Wartime Britain allowed for freer lifestyles, work, and independence: a true social liberation. However, it did not completely revolutionise women's social standing. Statistics show reluctance of women joining industries, and many wanting a traditional family life after the war. War failed to secure women greater protective legislation at work and the government was insistent placing women back in the home. Not enough change was made during WWII, as a feminist agenda took as long as to the 1960s to significantly resurge. However, as Donnelly argues: *"It would be a mistake to argue that there was a transformation of women's socio-economic status as a result of the war, but it would be equally misleading to claim the war produced no longer-term consequences at all for women in any field."*<sup>19</sup>

---

<sup>19</sup> DONNELLY, M. – *Britain in the Second World War*, pg. 45

Page Word Count: 272  
Accumulative Word Count: 2,686

### Social Policy

In 1940, Atlee said, 'I am quite certain that the world that must emerge from this war must be a world attuned to our ideals.' Labour, a socialist party achieved a landslide victory with a majority of 146 in the post war election. Undoubtedly, this was a result of the war and the supposed swing to the left in British politics with Labour's popularity growing as they campaigned to bring about the social change wanted by war weary Britons.

The demand for a new Britain after the war was great and was accelerated by The Beveridge Report in 1942. *"This proved to be the most significant political event of the war"* <sup>20</sup> Beveridge proposed a scheme to tackle all key areas of social inequality in Britain: 'the five giants'. Opinion polls indicated around 86% of the public wanted Beveridge's proposals put into action. WWII had created a great deal of uncertainty. For example, housing had to be helped from city bomb damage, so it seemed logical to rectify the squalor that was lived in at the same time and mass unemployment was feared as demobilisation of millions occurred. The scheme would help every one of them in a comprehensive and universal system. The Beveridge Report seemed idyllic and addressing the needs of the people. Social change was driven by the war illuminating the concerns of the public and a feasible method to cater to them. Contributions for such a system, it was argued, would be beneficial for the fragile economy of the war, the propositions pushing for social change perfect in the aftermath of a war.

---

<sup>20</sup> FIELDING, S. – *Blitz to Blair* (TIRATSOO, N.), pg. 43

Page Word Count: 264  
Accumulative Word Count: 2,950

The Labour Party were supportive of the Beveridge Report, and insistent on post war social change. Their victory in 1945 emphasises a 'swing to the left' of the electorate, 2 out of 5 voters having changed their political opinion since 1939. There was a deep set anger towards the 'guilty men' running the country — rich and old politicians who understood little of the lower classes. War acted as a locomotive of social change by leading to the fall of these men, and the old values they stood for. There had been a change in the public as they looked to have leaders advocating social reforms in a post war world. Awareness of issues for women and children had been spread by the war, but the Conservative party saw no need to address them. It was through sheer demand the Beveridge Report was debated, war had made the circumstances no longer ignorable. Labour's policy seemed attuned the needs of the British, "*the trend was essentially one towards left-wing attitudes, with the Labour Party as the natural beneficiary.*"<sup>21</sup> It was Labour's policies that won them their government - focused on social change over the Conservatives foreign policy manifesto. This shows how the British public wanted greater reforms like a welfare state, and arguably social change. Labour did well to respond to the demand for welfare reform which would see social change in Britain, protecting the disadvantaged more like the war had shown was possible through state intervention. The NHS was created, making changes in society as health improved and it was no longer just the wealthy who had access to suitable medical care, closing the gap between the classes. The war ensured the electorate voted for a party looking for social change, and the changes Labour made in the 40s last to today, making it not only successful, but a long lasting form of social

---

<sup>21</sup> ADDISON, P. – *The Road to 1945*, pg. 128

Page Word Count: 309  
Accumulative Word Count: 3,262

change working towards diminishing inequalities. WWII had proven a welfare state was not only feasible, but effective.

1943, for Addison, saw a surge in consensus as reconstruction was being announced by Churchill. A White Paper chase followed with papers published on employment, health care, and the Education Act of 1944. War had prompted the government to show greater responsibility for those who were struggling. The desire for welfare reform arguably mirrors the desire for social change, Harris contends, however, "*Wartime consensus [did] exist ... It is rather that the [Titmuss] thesis perhaps exaggerated the extent to which the artificial circumstances of war could provide a permanent stable basis for the post-war welfare state.*"<sup>22</sup> It is argued that people voted out of self-interest rather than for a greater social good. However, it would be unfair to hold that few people wanted social change after war revealing issues and presenting concerns for the future.

Therefore, the response being so positive towards the Beveridge Report prompted a White Paper chase, the public no longer accepting their poor conditions that were no longer ignorable because of war, effectively seeking social change. Wartime additionally paved the way for Labour and their legacy inducing reforms. Labour won their election through policy, and this was essential to creating a welfare state that helped bring about social change. War had shown that state intervention worked and the public were enthusiastic. Whilst a swing to the left across all of Britain is unlikely, demand for social change was undeniably high.

---

<sup>22</sup> HARRIS, J. – *Emergence of the Welfare State in Britain and Germany* (MOMMSEN, W.S.), pg. 259

Page Word Count: 250  
Accumulative Word Count: 3,512

### Conclusion

WWII undeniably created a form of social change in Britain, however, it was not as complete and benevolent as the traditional argument poses.

Class barriers before 1939 were an immense problem. The Blitz and evacuation saw classes mixing and exposed them to the diverse lifestyles. Rationing promoted better health amongst the poorest, a positive catalyst of social change. However, a national cohesion was simply an exaggeration of isolated cases in small areas. Anger existed between the classes; the rich continued use money to access black markets, luxury shelters. Many looked down upon the children they took on. Nevertheless, whether out of middle class disgust or genuine concern for urban dwellers, attention was drawn towards the plight of the cities. War had made their bad conditions worse. It was made clear to the government that this could not continue, nor would the public accept it to continue. This was some drive for social change caused by the war.

War acted as locomotive of social change for women in the greatest way by giving them a sense of individuality, not just a life as a mother and wife. By entering workplaces of heavy industry, women learned new skills and achieved a greater financial independence. This allowed them to behave differently in society, drinking and having looser relationships. However, evidence suggests that the vast majority of women wanted to return to their roles at home, objecting to the 'double burden' of working and parenting. The government similarly did not further social change through concrete laws. Equal pay and other policies put in place were only transitory

Page Word Count: 259  
Accumulative Word Count: 3,771

and the government insisted on women returning home and maintaining feminine attributes. Therefore, the war failed to liberate women, and with confidence being largely incalculable, there are little statistics to suggest that problems between the sexes were reduced.

WWII greatest success in promoting social change lies in how it paved the way for a Labour landslide victory in 1945. The Beveridge Report gained impressive support and pressured the government into considered long lasting improvements to society. Labour's victory provides some evidence of a 'swing to the left', the war encouraging people to rely on greater state intervention, and the effects of this benefitted all parts of society. The universal policies put into place 1945-1951 as a direct result of the war had a huge impact on the lives of the British, the welfare state exceeding expectations of the public and its critics.

In conclusion, war to a reasonable extent acted as a locomotive of social change. Despite exacerbating pre-existing problems, such as the rich buying security, and pressuring women to be both workers and mothers, it forced the classes to mix. This highlighting the shocking conditions of inner cities. Awareness raised by war of the need for social change and proved hugely successful as the public voted largely for Labour's promises of social reform. Therefore, war acted as a locomotive for social change to create a more equal society with individuals aware of their worth.

Page Word Count: 232  
Total Word Count: 4,000

## Bibliography

### Primary Sources

ATLEE, C. – Labour Party Conference, 1940

### Secondary Sources

ADDISON, P. – *The Road to 1945*

CALDER, A. – *The People's War*

DONNELLY, M. – *Britain in the Second World War*

HARRISSON, T. — *Living Through the Blitz*

HOLLOWAY, G - *Women and Work in Britain Since 1840*

HYLTON, S. – *Their Darkest Hour*

LEVINE, J. – *The Secret History of the Blitz*

MARR, A. – *A History of Modern Britain*

MOMMSEN, W.S. - *Emergence of the Welfare State in Britain and Germany*

SMITH, H.L. - *Britain in the Second World War, A Social History*

TAYLOR, A.J.P. – *English History 1914-1945*

TIRATSOO, N. - *Blitz to Blair*

TITMUSS, R - *Problems of Social Policy*

WALLER, M. – *A Family In Wartime*

ZIEGLER, P. — *London At War 1939-1945*