

Social Security Act passed 14 September 1938

(MCH, 2020ss)

admitted n.a (s)

1938

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The cornerstone of the first Labour government's welfare programme, the Social Security Act overhauled the pension system and extended benefits for families, invalids and the unemployed.

From the late 19th century New Zealand had gained a reputation as the 'social laboratory of the world' and a 'working man's paradise'. This status was severely challenged by the harsh economic conditions of the 1930s Great Depression. High unemployment, grim work camps and queues at soup kitchens shocked many New Zealanders.

Labour won the 1935 election on a platform that every New Zealander had a right to a reasonable standard of living. The community was responsible for ensuring that people were not overwhelmed by circumstances against which they could not protect themselves. Labour's ultimate response to the Depression was the Social Security Act.

Act combined a new free-at-the-point-of-use health system with a comprehensive array of welfare benefits. It was financed by a tax surcharge of one

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shilling in the pound, or 5%. Supporters envisaged a scheme that would protect New Zealanders 'from the cradle to the grave'.

Read more on NZHistory

Children and adolescents, 1930-1960 – Children and adolescents, 1930-1960

Michael Joseph Savage portrait – State housing

Michael Joseph Savage

External links

Welfare, work and families, 1918-1945 (Te Ara)

Social Security: scope of 1938 legislation (1966 encyclopaedia)

Michael Joseph Savage (Te Ara biographies)



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