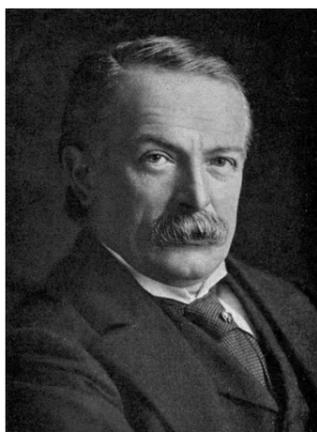


A Short History of England—1918-39—Simon Jenkins—The Locust Years



David Lloyd George

'Britain in 1918 was a bruised, expectant land. Those who had given their all in war believed that national security overseas should breed social security at home. British citizens wanted protection not just against foreign enemies but against want, illness, unemployment and even unfair distribution of income.'

Q. Why did Lloyd George pass a new housing act?

Q. To what age were children expected to stay in school until under the Liberal Government?

Lloyd George's coalition soon ran out of political capital and so, he had to resort to other means of making money.

Q. How did Lloyd George finance his private office?

The economy entered a new recession in 1920. By 1921 the Treasury was overwhelmed by the burden of the government's social programme and the cost of servicing war debts.

Q. What were the proposed cuts in public spending called?



Stanley Baldwin

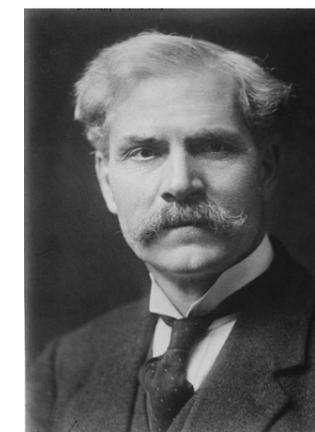
British politics were now complicated by the shifting tectonic plates of the British left, as the Labour vote grew and the Liberals declined and fractured. The Tories were almost always the largest party. Following the brief spell of Bonar Law as prime minister, Stanley Baldwin came in and was perfectly cast as the archetypal safe pair of hands.

Q. What did Baldwin try and do to help the British economy recover?

Baldwin was seized by conviction and this was so drastic a change in policy that, with Liberals and Labour opposed, he felt he should call an early election on the issue.

Q. What was the 1923 election fought over?

The Tories lost ground. They were still the largest party but in a minority, with Labour in second place. The Liberal leader Asquith argued that the electorate had voted overwhelmingly against tariffs and, since Labour was the largest anti-tariff party, it should form a government with his support.



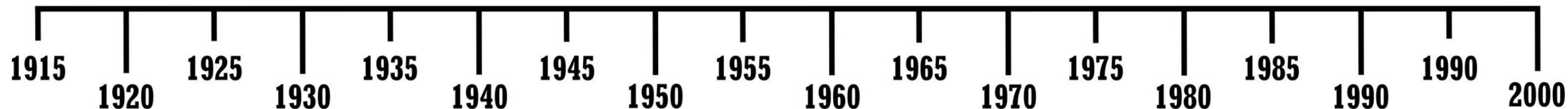
Ramsay MacDonald

In January 1924, Ramsay Macdonald was duly sworn in as the first Labour prime minister. The arrival of Labour in power, within living memory of working-class enfranchisement, was considered sensational.

Q. Why couldn't Macdonald's government make many political changes?

Q. Why was Macdonald's government accused of being Communist sympathisers?

Macdonald's government was not a success and following a lack of political changes and accusations of Communist ties, Labour were bundled out of office after only 288 days.



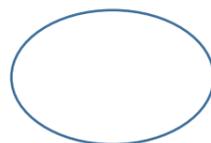
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Stanley Baldwin

Following Labour's failure in government, Baldwin led the Conservatives to election victory with 419 Tory MPs to Labour's 151. Baldwin spoke of a nation that craved a return to pre-war normality.

Q. Under Baldwin's government the consumer economy boomed. Identify the benefits that occurred from this consumer boom.



The Conservatives' policy of promising 'tranquillity and freedom from adventures and commitments both at home and abroad', never again to be the 'policeman of the world', was popular.

In 1924, Baldwin brought Winston Churchill into his cabinet as the chancellor of the exchequer.

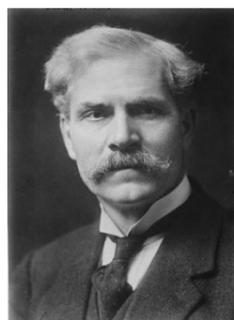
Q. What mistake did Churchill make?

Britain's coal exports were instantly rendered uncompetitive on world markets, leading to a cut in mining output and thus in wages.

Q. What happened in May of 1926 due to these issues?

Baldwin was in his element as peacemaker. He succeeded in isolating the coal industry following a commission of inquiry.

Q. What was one of the reasons as to why Baldwin lost the 1929 election?



Macdonald and the National Government

In another hung parliament the Liberals decided to put Labour and Ramsay Macdonald back in office. The new team had no time to prove itself. Within weeks, on the 24th October, a bubble in US bond prices burst, leading to a crash not only on Wall Street but on all western stock markets.

Q. What did the new chancellor Philip Snowden propose to combat the crash?

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Few Labour ministers could stomach Snowden's plan, the cabinet resigned. But when Macdonald took his resignation to the palace, he returned to tell his stunned colleagues that he and not Baldwin had been asked to head a national coalition with the Tories. In October 1931, a new election gave Macdonald his mandate, but only 13 Labour MPs stayed loyal to him and he depended on 473 'national Conservatives'.

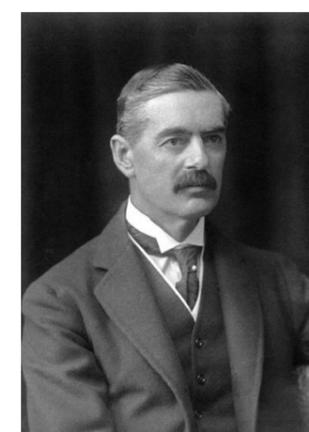
Q. What was the Jarrow Crusade?

Q. Who was Oswald Mosley and what did he create?

Britain followed other nations response to the economic depression by implementing Snowden's plan.

Q. What was Snowden's plan?

In the 1935 general election, Macdonald lost his seat and so Baldwin returned as prime minister. However, following the abdication of King Edward VIII, Baldwin was spent and would eventually step aside.



Neville Chamberlain

In 1937, an exhausted Baldwin gave way to Neville Chamberlain as prime minister. As chancellor for 6 years, Chamberlain had steered the country safely out of depression and taken forward the welfare state.

Q. When did Britain begin rearmament?

Q. What did Chamberlain say on his arrival back at Heston airport?

History was not kind to Chamberlain, seeing his as the principal appeaser of Hitler's Germany, though recent historians have been less harsh. Public opinion and most of the press were strongly for accommodating European dictators. They remained averse to a return to war, grasping at anything that might fuel their optimism.

Q. How much time did Chamberlain buy Britain before Germany broke his promise to Chamberlain?

In March 1939, Hitler broke his promise to Chamberlain and occupied Prague. In August he signed the Molotov-Ribbentrop non-aggression pact with Stalin and, on 1st September, launched his 'blitzkrieg' on Poland. Britain was now at war with Germany.

