WAR and THE TRANSFORMATION OF BRITISH SOCIETY 1931-51

Key Topic 1: The impact of the Depression, 1931-39

The growth of unemployment and the government response

On 24 and 29 October 1929, Wall Street, the US stock exchange suffered heavy losses as people began to sell shares in large quantities. For eight years Americans had invested in share and seen the prices go up and up. Now the exact opposite happened and prices went down and down. Hundreds of thousands of people lost their life savings. Businesses went bust as people stopped buying goods. Banks collapsed because loans were not repaid. Millions of workers became unemployed and could no longer afford to pay their mortgage. They lost their homes and had to live on the streets. This was the Great Depression.

The growth of unemployment

As far as Britain was concerned, the main effect was that people all over the world stopped spending money and began to save. This hit industry very hard and many people began to find themselves out of work as companies stopped making things. By 1932 there were 3,000,000 people out of work in Britain.

The ‘Old Industries’ were the worst affected. These were the industries that had grown up in Britain during the Industrial Revolution in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries. The Old Industries had developed around the coalfields of the north because they had depended upon steam power. They mostly produced raw materials or heavy goods, such as ships, textiles (cotton and wool), coal, iron and steel

Worst hit industry of all was shipbuilding. If no one wanted to buy and sell anything, then no new ships were needed to transport goods around. In 1930 British shipbuilders built 1,400,000 tonnes of shipping. In 1933 the figure had fallen to 133,000 tonnes. From shipbuilding, unemployment spread to steel making and coalmining. During the First World War both these industries had worked at full capacity, but after the war they faced foreign competition. German and Polish coal was cheaper than British coal in the 1920s.

Textiles were also affected as man-made fibres were invented in the 1920s and soon become popular. Man-made fibres mixed with cotton and wool produced much more hard-wearing clothes, which were also easier to wash. British textile industries also faced increasing competition from Japan and the USA during the 1920s. Both of these countries had developed their own industries during the First World War. Between 1929 and 1939 the textiles industries were reduced in size by 40%.

The main problem affecting all of these industries was that they depended on exports. Coal, steel, shipbuilding and textiles all produced raw materials that needed to be sold around the world if the industry was to be profitable. Shipbuilding did not produce raw materials, but ships could only be bought by large companies or governments.

From the early 1920s British industry faced more and more competition from abroad. As the Depression hit harder, foreign governments and companies looked for the cheapest product and that rarely came from Britain. Too many British companies were much smaller than their foreign competitors. Palmer’s Yard at Jarrow was only one case in point. British governments also followed a policy of free trade in the 1920s. This allowed foreign goods to come into Britain freely. But on the other hand British companies trying to export often had to pay import duties to foreign governments.

In 1931 the national unemployment rate was 23%, but this figure hid the real effects of the Depression. By the mid 1930s the worst hit areas like Jarrow on Tyneside and Merthyr Tydfil in South Wales had over 60% unemployment. However, other areas, such as the south and midlands, with newer industries, were hardly affected at all. For example in Birmingham and Oxford unemployment was less than 6%. The Great Depression only affected certain parts of the country really badly. Overall, about 90% of the people of Britain found themselves getting better off in the 1930s. Prices fell very quickly, which meant that most people had more money to spend.

The New Industries produced goods that people wanted to buy, because they made a big difference to their lives. Vacuum cleaners took much of the effort out of housework. The wireless and talking pictures provided entertainment. Motor cars and bicycles enabled people to get out and about much more. The countryside became popular with townspeople for almost the time. Cycle rides and rambling became great crazes.

In 1938, Parliament passed the Holidays with Pay Act which gave workers in Britain eight days paid holiday for the first time. Until then most people never went on holiday, except maybe for a day out at the seaside. In 1931 only 1,500,000 people had paid holidays, but in 1939 the number had risen to 11,000,000.

Checkpoint: Old and New Industries in the Depression

Old	New

The Labour Government response to the Depression

In 1929, the Labour Party had won the general election and had started to introduce reforms. In 1930, it began to build new houses. It also spent £42,000,000 trying to help the unemployed. Since 1911, when it had been introduced for the first time, unemployment benefit had been increased. In 1920 everybody who earned less than £250 a year was included. In 1922, benefit was increased for an unlimited number of weeks. But as the number of unemployed rose from 1929 to 1931, the amount spent on benefit went up and the amount of money that the government was receiving in taxes went down. By 1931, £120,000,000 was going on benefit and the government simply ran out of money.

In an effort to investigate the problem the government set up the May Committee. This reported that the government needed to make severe cuts in spending and to borrow money. In August 1931 there was a crisis and the British government had to ask for loans from the USA. US banks agreed to lend the money, but wanted a cut in unemployment benefit as part of the deal. This came as a blow to the Labour government. When the Cabinet discussed the matter, they decided not to accept the offer. The cabinet voted twelve to seven to reject the cuts. The prime minister, Ramsay MacDonald, went to the king to resign. But King George V apparently asked MacDonald to stay on as prime minister and head a National Coalition government. That meant a government in which there were ministers from all of the parties. The king said that the situation was so desperate that all the parties had to pull together to get Britain out of the crisis. MacDonald agreed, even though this meant deserting his party and his colleagues.

For more information about Ramsay MacDonald, click here

The National Government took office on 24 August 1931. The Cabinet contained four Conservatives, four Labour and two Liberal ministers. But most of the Labour MPs refused to back MacDonald and they went into opposition. They regarded MacDonald as a traitor. Later in 1931 MacDonald won a general election with a large majority, after having appealed for a 'Doctor's Mandate' to get the economy going again. This suggested that he was going to restore the health of the country, no matter what it took to do it. In fact the National Government did little to put the economy back on its feet.

The National Government response

The National Government introduced short term measures which were designed to restore confidence in Britain abroad and persuade the American banks to lend money to the government. People who worked for the government had their pay cut by 10 per cent. These included teachers, civil servants, the police and the armed forces. There was actually a mutiny in the navy at Invergordon in protest against the cuts. Unemployment benefit was also cut by 10 per cent.

The National Government also decided to go off the Gold Standard. This had the effect of reducing the value of the pound against foreign currencies. British exports became cheaper and imports became more expensive. This helped British exporters and at the same time encouraged the British people to buy British.

The Means Test

To try to tackle the high cost of unemployment benefit, the ‘Means Test’ was introduced. This meant that after six months on unemployment benefit, people went on to **Uncovenanted Benefit**, known as ‘**The Dole**’. Before they could receive the Dole, people had to have their houses inspected and all of their savings and possessions checked. This was the ‘Means Test’. An inspector visited the family to investigate their ‘means’. This meant that all of their possessions were listed to see if there was anything of value. The family could be forced to sell possessions, such as furniture, if they wanted to go on getting benefits. If a family had any other sources of income, like a part time job, or the pension of an elderly relative, the amounts were deducted from the weekly payments.

The payments under the Means Test for a family of two adults and three children were fixed at 29 shillings and threepence (£1.46). In 1936 this sum was raised to 36 shillings (£1.80), but these sums well below the average wage of £3.00. The Means Test was very unpopular. People hated having an inspector go through all of their belongings and then force them to sell some of them. They also had to make relatives go and live somewhere else if they wanted to get the full amount each week.

Other National Government measures

The National Government also raised income tax to help pay for the increased cost of unemployment benefit and the repayment of the loans to the USA and in 1932 tried to prevent a crisis ever happening again. It passed the **Import Duties Act**, which put a 10-20 per cent duty on all imports. This increased the cost of all foreign goods and encouraged people to buy British. The government also signed the **Ottawa Agreements**. These allowed the Commonwealth countries to trade with each other on preferential terms. This meant that Britain could buy food more cheaply from countries like Canada, Australia and New Zealand. Finally, the **Exchange Equalisation Account** was set up. This kept reserves of gold and foreign currency in Britain. One of the problems in 1931 was that the government ran out of foreign currency and so could not buy anything from abroad. The Exchange Equalisation Account meant that Britain would never again run out of foreign currency. The exchange control set by the Exchange Equalisation Account lasted until the 1980s.

National Government and Depressed Industries

The National Government tried to help the old industries by encouraging amalgamation and rationalisation. Amalgamation meant trying to persuade small companies to join together with other ones to grow bigger. This would make it possible to produce goods at lower prices. One of the difficulties faced by many British companies was that they were too small to compete with the much larger corporations in the USA. Amalgamation helped British companies to compete more effectively overseas. Rationalisation meant reducing competition by closing down smaller and less profitable companies. When amalgamation took place, some smaller companies were closed down and the workers sacked. Production was moved to the biggest factories.

These policies were followed in cotton, coal, shipbuilding and iron and steel. The new, large companies were given governments grants to help them develop. It was fine if you had a job, but in many areas it only made the problem worse. The worst hit areas were the North East, the North West, Central Scotland and South Wales. These became known as the Special Areas. In 1934, the government passed the Special Areas Act, which offered grants to companies that would move to the worst hit areas of unemployment (the Special Areas), but only £2,000,000 was offered.

The result was that not much was done and unemployment only came down very slowly in those areas. In fact by 1938 about £8,400,000 had been spent, but only 121 new firms had been set up and 14,900 jobs created.

The basic policy of the National Government was that the effects of the Depression could not be overcome through government intervention. Although the National Government was prepared to assist companies and areas, it was not prepared to try to get the ball rolling by providing large grants or large orders. This meant that the effects of the Depression lasted much longer in Britain than they did in some other countries. The National Government did not believe that it could do much to help. In the USA and Germany the governments began to build roads and dams to provide work, but, while the National Government gave help, it relied on private companies to do most of the work.

A further reason was that few people knew the truth about what was going on. Nowadays, the town of Jarrow would have been on the television and the front page of the newspapers, but there was nothing like that in the 1930s.

Checkpoint: The National Government

How was each of the following used to attack the effects of the Depression?

The Means Test	
Import Duties Act	
Ottawa Agreements	
Amalgamation	
Rationalisation	
Special areas Act	

The experience of the unemployed

For those living in the depressed areas, unemployment badly affected standards of living, health and housing.

There are many different forms of evidence for the lives of people in Britain during the 1930s. There are of course many people who still remember the times and can describe their experiences. Radio programmes also investigated the difficulties faced and broadcast their findings.

This is part of an interview with the wife of a shipyard worker broadcast on the wireless in 1935.

> If only he had work, just think how wonderful it would be. In the twelve years since we were married my husband has worked eighteen months. When we were married he was really handsome, but now he's just skin and bones.

This short extract really conveys the despair that many people must have felt as they saw their livelihood disappear and realised that there was nowhere that they could turn.

An extract from another interview with the wife of an unemployed worker shows that what help the unemployed did receive was never enough.

> My husband never changes his dole money, but although he doesn't keep a halfpenny pocket money, we still can't manage. And we don't waste nothing. There's no enjoyment comes out of our money – no pictures, no papers, no sports. Everything is patched and mended in our house.

As wages fell, the effects were felt by other people, as this interview with a shopkeeper in 1932 reveals. This was published in the book 'Hungry Britain'.

> Last October I took £19.84 a week for bread. Last week I took £7.33. I now sell forty-eight packets of margarine a week; I used to sell twenty-four a day. I am not selling any cheese at all, nor hardly any tea. I used to sell ninety-six pints of milk a day. Now I sell about one pint a day.

This account reveals another aspect of the impact of the Depression. As wages fell people had less to spend and had to make whatever savings they could. One way was to buy cheaper food. But cheaper food could lead to malnutrition.

For more information on unemployment in South Wales, including, photographs, interviews and an interactive map, click here

Poverty

The average weekly income of an unemployed family was £1.46. However, the average weekly income for an employed family was £2.57. A survey in Stockton-on-

Tees showed that a poor family was likely to spend only 3 shillings (15p) a head on food per week, while a richer family would spend at least 6 shillings (30p). Some reports compared the state of the poor in London with a survey of London by Charles Booth in the late nineteenth century.

> There are still more than a quarter of a million people living below the poverty line. When we consider how very low and bare is the minimum standard of subsistence which marks the Booth poverty line, it is impossible to rest content with a condition of things under which one in ten of all human beings are living below this level.

Another survey carried out at the beginning of the twentieth century was by Seebohm Rowntree. In 1901, he had found that 30 percent of people in York lived below the poverty line. In 1936, Rowntree completed a second survey. He described his findings.

> Housing is immeasurably better, health is better, education is better. Cheap means of transport, the provision of public libraries and cheap books, the wireless, the cinema and other forms of entertainment, have placed within the reach of everyone forms of recreation unknown and un-thought of forty years ago. But there is no cause for satisfaction in the fact that in a country so rich as Britain, over 30 per cent of the workers in a typical provincial city should have incomes so small that it is beyond their means to live above the poverty line.

This extract from Rowntree’s second report into poverty in York revealed the two sides of the coin in the 1930s. For many people, and in particular those with jobs in the new and expanding industries, the 1930s was a time of increased luxury. But for the poor, or for those without jobs, the 1930s was a time of hardship and degradation.

Health

Not surprisingly, the health of the unemployed and their families, especially their children, suffered. Several studies showed that the unemployed had an inadequate diet. In 1936, John Boyd Orr published the results of a survey into the diets and health of the British people. He studied a representative sample of 1,000 people, who he divided into six income groups. He concluded that 4,500,000 people had a diet that was completely inadequate in all respects. A further 5,000,000 people suffered from some forms of deficiency. Overall he believed that one tenth of the population was seriously under-nourished. This percentage included one fifth of all children.

The results of all of these surveys were summed up in a report published in the late 1930s.

> The richer family will consume on the average 12 per cent less bread and flour and 16 per cent fewer potatoes than the poorer. On the other hand it will eat nearly 36 per cent more meat, more than twice as much fish and 68 per cent more eggs. It will have 56 per cent more butter, 38 per cent more cheese and more than twice as much fresh milk. Finally the richer family will eat two and a half times as much fruit as the poorer and about three times the quantity of vegetables, apart from potatoes.

The effects of poverty are summed up in this account written in the late 1930s.

When you are unemployed, which is to say when you are underfed, harassed, bored and miserable, you don't want to eat dull, wholesome food. You want something a little bit tasty. There is always some cheaply pleasant thing to tempt you. Let's have three pennorth of chips! Run out and buy us a nice twopenny ice cream! Put the kettle on and we'll have a nice cup of tea! That's how your mind works when you are on the dole.

Checkpoint: The effects of the Depression on working people

Unemployment	
Health	
Housing	

The government did take some account of these difficulties. In 1934 set up a subsidised milk scheme for schoolchildren and allowed free milk to be provided by some local authorities

The effects of these differences were clearly shown in other statistics. In Britain the death rate hardly fell in the 1930s and for every three children of richer families who died young, there were eight children from poorer families. In 1933, an investigation in Newcastle revealed that one in three schoolchildren were physically unfit because of poor health. Comparisons with children from richer families showed that the poor were ten times more likely to catch bronchitis, eight times more likely to catch pneumonia and five times more likely to catch rickets.

Women often suffered worst of all during the Depression. If an industry or a factory was in trouble, it would be the women workers who would be dismissed first. Married women were not even counted in the unemployed statistics. Consequently the number of women in Domestic Service went up in the 1930s, as women looked for any chance of finding work.

Women also suffered from health problems, as a report from 1931 explained.

In Lancashire today a young married weaver who leaves the mill to have a baby runs a greater risk of an agonising death in childbirth than her mother, or even her grandmother did.

Here one woman describes her experiences before the Second World War, this was written down in the 1980s.

I had my daughter before the 1939 war. At the maternity home we had to pay £2 deposit and another 10 shillings when she came. I got up at six in the morning and said to my husband, ‘Come on, we’re ready’. I had to walk down to the maternity home with a hole in my shoe.

I never went to the doctor’s. There was a post-natal clinic, but I didn’t go. We got no help with anything.

Another woman talking in 1985 describes health cover in the late 1930s.

My husband used to pay a stamp of one and sixpence a week, a health insurance stamp for himself only, for the doctor or for any medication he would need. He also paid a scheme at work, threepence a week, which was called a hospital scheme and that covered the whole family for any hospitalisation that was needed, but not maternity. I paid threepence a week into a medical aid for my son, but I was in good health so I didn’t bother about myself

One industry which had employed large numbers of women was textiles and that was very badly affected in the 1930s. But unemployment was only one of the problems that women faced in the 1930s. National Insurance usually only covered the worker, which would normally be the man. That meant that women and children were often

not covered for medical treatment. They would have to pay for visits to the doctor and for any medicine. Inside the family, many women sacrificed themselves to feed their children or give them medical treatment.

Women who were able to find work were paid much lower wages than men. Usually they received only two thirds of a man’s wage. Many women also worked in occupations, such as shops and offices, where wages were very low.

Checkpoint: Women during the Depression

Explain three reasons why women were often worst affected by the Depression

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One major cause of poor health was the quality of housing that was available in some areas of Britain. In 1935 a survey concluded that 12 per cent of the people of Britain lived at least two to a room. In some parts of central London there were three to four families living in each house and many of these families lived in one room.

In other parts of Britain the situation was just as bad. A survey of Merseyside in 1932 described one street like this.

Many of the larger houses in St Anne’s ward go back to the late eighteenth century, when they were the dwellings of prosperous merchants. Now they make slums even more deplorable than the back-to-back cottages. Each room is sub-let to a separate family. There are no toilets and not even a sink or tap. Nearly every family heats its water and cooks its food on an open fire.

In Manchester things were no better.

> Number 4: The general appearance and condition of this house inside are very miserable. It is a dark house and the plaster on the passage walls is in a bad condition. There is no sink or tap in the house. They are in the back yard. In frosty mornings the family is without water. In this house live a man and a wife and seven children ranging from 15 years old to one year old. There is also a large and varying number of rats.

Unemployment also had psychological effects. Investigators found a common trend for those experiencing long-term unemployment. The first week or so unemployment was treated as a holiday. They got up early, put on their best clothes and went down to the local labour exchange seeking work. After a few weeks confidence began to go, expectations fell and the unemployed took less interest in their personal appearance. Many, used to being the breadwinner, felt guilty and lost all self-respect and esteem. They stopped looking for work and hung around on street corners.

Hunger marches

The most important form of protest was the hunger march, the first of which was in 1931 in the Manchester area. By the end of 1931, there had been marches in more than thirty towns, but the following year the situation grew worse. In January army reservists were called out to deal with a march in Rochdale and in Belfast in October 1932 two men were killed when the police opened fire on demonstrators.

The National Unemployed Workers Movement was set up to try to put pressure on the government. It organised a march on London in October 1932. Eighteen columns were to march from different parts of the country and meet in Hyde Park. They met on 27 October, but were confronted with a big police presence. 77 people were arrested. On 30 October the marchers attempted to present a petition to Parliament, but were again stopped by the police.

A hunger march in Stockton in 1935

The behaviour of the marchers did not help their cause. Their leader was Will Hannington, a communist, and they were not supported by the TUC or by the Labour Party. Marches continued until 1936, but had little effect. The National Government was determined not to give in to pressure from groups like the NUWM and the behaviour of marchers undermined the chances of the Jarrow marchers.

This is a description of the results of a march in Salford near Manchester.

> For some time there was a pitched battle in the Square. The police officers seemed to be in the centre of a melee in which arms and legs were whirling madly about. The mounted police drew their batons and, urging their horses forward into the throng, began to drive back the rioters. Many men who were pushed over were trampled on by the crowd before they could get to their feet. Others clung to the police horses until they were shaken off.

The effects of the depression on Jarrow

The worst affected town of all during the Depression was Jarrow, near Newcastle, where unemployment reached 80% at one point. This was because most people in the town depended upon one shipyard for their livelihood. The town of Jarrow became famous in the middle of the nineteenth century. In 1851, a shipyard was set up there by Charles Mark Palmer. It became very successful and built up a reputation for good reliable workmanship.

By the 1880s, Palmer's employed 10,000 men. This was remarkable as the town of Jarrow only had about 35,000 inhabitants. Another 19,000 people depended on the shipyard workers, leaving only the other 6,000 people who had no connection with Palmer's. In the late nineteenth century the yard did very well. During the First World War, it had all the work that it could manage, but in the 1920s things began to change. There were fewer warships being built and after 1929 fewer and fewer cargo ships. In the early 1930s orders dried up completely.

The problems faced by Jarrow were typical of those of many small towns in the industrial areas of Britain. Palmer’s was the main employer in the town, with something like 80 per cent of the work force. It was also an integrated yard, which meant that it did everything from producing iron to making a complete ship. So everything in the town was geared to shipbuilding. But like many companies in England, it was owned by one family and had been unable to invest in new equipment. As industry abroad grew bigger and more efficient, Palmer’s, and Jarrow, was simply unable to compete.

This account, from a Jarrow shipbuilder, describes the situation in the 1920s and early 1930s. It shows how Jarrow began to suffer after the First World War. In fact all of the ‘old’ industries were hard hit in the 1920s and failed to recover in the 1930s.

> I returned home to Jarrow in 1921. There was no prospect of a job and the streets were becoming dilapidated. From 1922 I was unemployed. In 1929 I became a Jarrow councillor and pledged myself to do whatever I could for Jarrow. Then in 1931 everything went bankrupt, and we in Jarrow had to suffer for it. Often my wife and I went without a meal on Sunday in order to feed the children. We patched put all our clothes as did all the others. In the town 156 shops were closed or empty

The effect of the Depression on the town of Jarrow was dramatic. Normal life almost ceased to exist as families tried to find any way that they could to survive. The effect of living conditions like these was very serious. The death rates and infant mortality rates in Jarrow were monitored by the Jarrow Public Health Committee and published. This shows that the local authorities were aware of the problems being caused, but were able to do little about them. The national figures were also published alongside the Jarrow figures to show just how much the people of Jarrow were suffering.

The death rate is the number of people who die in each year per thousand of the population. In Jarrow the figure was much higher than the national average. In 1936 the national average was 9, in Jarrow it was 15. The infant mortality rate is the number of babies that die each year in every thousand born. In 1936 the national figure was 57. The figures for Jarrow were very high, 114, which shows that malnutrition and poor health were widespread in the town.

	1919	**1931**	**1936**
Death Rates			
Jarrow	20	15	15
National average	13	10	9
Infant mortality			
Jarrow	151	159	114
National average	58	62	57

Families like these could do nothing to help themselves and were totally dependent upon support from the local community or the government. The problem was that in Jarrow there were thousands of families like this. The local community simply could not cope with the situation.

Palmer's also suffered from another problem. By the 1930s the yard was really too small for the type of ship that was being built. The Queen Elizabeth and Queen Mary, which were launched in the 1930s, were over 80,000 tons. Palmer's just could not match that. The end came in 1934. A group of shipyard owners set up National Shipbuilders' Security Ltd. They decided to buy up smaller yards and then scrap them. Palmer's was one of the first to go. In 1934 it was bought up and the yard was closed. It was announced that no ships would be built there for 40 years.

The result for Jarrow was appalling. Unemployment reached 80% at one point. When the novelist J.B. Priestley visited the town in 1934 he recorded that only one in three shops was open and men were standing around on street corner in their hundreds.

The MP for Jarrow, Ellen Wilkinson wrote a book in 1938 entitled ‘The Town that was Murdered’. In it she left no one in any doubt about who she believed was responsible for the town’s problems. She accused the government and big business of betraying the people of Jarrow and then leaving them to their fate.

In 1930 the NATIONAL SHIPBUILDERS' SECURITY LTD was set up. This company bought up and scrapped one-third of the British shipbuilding industry in an alleged attempt to save yards from the economic collapse. NSS were able by the financial weakness of Palmers' to buy it up at scrap prices. Holders of the ordinary shares, such as the workmen, who in better days had invested their savings were left with worthless paper. Protests were made, but nothing effective could be done unless the government was prepared to act

Over the next few years the people of Jarrow sent a number of deputations to the Board of Trade in London. They got nowhere. In 1936 the last deputation met the President of the Board of Trade, a cabinet minister. He said, 'You must go back to Jarrow and work out your own salvation'. The government believed that it was doing all it could. It had spent some £2,000,000 on the Special Areas Act of 1934 and was not prepared to do any more. It was prepared to wait for things to improve rather than try to improve them.

The Jarrow Hunger March

In 1936, Jarrow made one last effort. A march was organised by the people of the town from Jarrow to London. The object was to attract attention to the plight of the town. This account was written by the Mayor of Jarrow at the time. He describes the reasoning behind the Jarrow March.

A campaign was started by the Labour Party to send a petition. Then it was decided to march with the petition. I opposed the decision. There were hunger marches going on all over and I didn't want to embarrass and put down the men. I eventually had to agree, and I marched to Darlington with some of the men. I managed to get time off from Spiller's in Newcastle. Some Communists wanted to join us on the march, but we wouldn't let them.

Eventually 200 men marched from Jarrow to London, some 270 miles, led by the mayor, the MP Ellen Wilkinson and town councillors. They marched in step in their best clothes so that they would have the greatest possible impact on the people that they passed. The men were turned out as smartly as possible and were clean-shaven. This was all part of the attempt to persuade the government that the March was not meant to be threatening. The organisers wanted to present Jarrow as a town that had done its best, but which could do and take not more. They were simply appealing for sympathy and help.

As the marchers made their way south, they were completely surprised by the receptions that they received. Everywhere they went they received great support and sympathy. They were put up in church halls and given free meals and their shoes were repaired free of charge. The Bishop of Ripon spoke out in their support and newspapers published accounts of their progress. But when they arrived in London, the situation was completely different.

The Jarrow Petition was presented to the House of Commons, but the Prime Minister, Stanley Baldwin refused to make any comment. The Jarrow Marchers had to return home without achieving anything. Baldwin's response was predictable. He had the reputation of not giving in to external pressure. In 1926 he had forced the

General Strike to come to an end and he did the same in 1936 with the Jarrow Marchers

The Jarrow Crusade certainly publicised the plight of towns like Jarrow in the more prosperous south. However, they did not succeed in getting work for the town. Moreover, when the marchers returned to Jarrow, they discovered that their unemployment benefit had been stopped because they had not been available for work while on the march.

For photographs of the Jarrow March, click here

For more information about the March, click here

Checkpoint: Jarrow

Why was Jarrow so badly hit be the effects of the Depression?

Why did the March achieve very little?

Jarrow	The March

Key topic 2: Britain alone

The BEF, Dunkirk and Churchill

Britain had declared war on Germany on 3 September 1939. The BEF had set off for France almost immediately and many air-raid precautions were put in place; children were evacuated. But nothing happened; for more than six months, during the ‘Phoney War’, Hitler finished off Poland and then prepared to strike in the west. The German armies had great success in the first year of the war, mainly because they used a new method of warfare known as Blitzkrieg or ‘lightning war’.

Hitler had remembered the lessons of the First World War and was determined to avoid trench warfare. Therefore he devised this new method which involved speed and surprise. It was based on two weapons – the aeroplane and the tank. Bombers attacked enemy airfields and communication centres. This was to prevent any resistance from enemy aircraft and slow down enemy reinforcements.

Parachutists were dropped behind enemy lines to capture bridges and other important targets and further disrupt communications. Dive bombers moved ahead of the tanks and attacked enemy strong points. Tanks broke through weak points in the enemy lines and travelled fast across country and outflanked the enemy front lines. Motorised infantry followed up to mop up resistance. It was very successful against Poland in September 1939 because it was a new and unexpected tactic. It was carried out very quickly and did not give the enemy the opportunity to recover.

Checkpoint: Blitzkrieg

How as it different from the fighting in the First World War?

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German invasion of the Low Countries and France May 1940

On 13 May 1940, the Germans launched a Blitzkrieg attack on Belgium and Holland. It was an outstanding success. German attacks rolled swiftly across Holland and Belgium. Dutch attempts to delay the German advance by opening the dykes and flooding the land were ineffective. The Germans used glider planes to land behind the Belgian line of defences and outflank their defenders. Holland surrendered in five days after a huge bombing of Rotterdam. Thirteen days later the Belgians surrendered.

Other German armies attacked France. This caught the French unawares. The French High Command was sure that the expensive line of underground forts on the Maginot Line would stop any German attack. The Germans, however, decided not to attack this line. Instead they attacked the weakest part of the French defences, the Ardennes. This was a heavily wooded area that seemed unsuitable for tanks. The French had assumed it was unsuitable for tanks because it was a hilly and wooded area.

French resistance crumbled as the German tanks raced to the Channel coast, where the Germans planned to cut off the retreat of the 150,000 strong British Expeditionary Force (BEF). By the tenth day the Germans had reached the Channel.

Dunkirk

The Germans quickly moved across the River Meuse, outflanked the British and French troops and moved to the coast beyond Abbeville. By 20 May 1940, huge numbers of British and French soldiers found themselves cut off from the rest of their forces. On 21 May the BEF, led by Lord Gort, attempted to break out but failed. They then retreated to Dunkirk where Gort hoped to evacuate as many soldiers as possible.

It was at this time that the British were most fortunate. On 20 May, Hitler gave the order to the German commander, Guderian, to stop his tanks in order to allow the Luftwaffe, the German air force, to complete the destruction of the British and French forces. This was a mistake which allowed the British time to regroup. The British launched 'Operation Dynamo'. Between 27 May and 4 June, as the Luftwaffe pounded the beaches, the Royal Navy and a host of vessels ranging from yachts to pleasure boats crossed the Channel to rescue the stranded troops.

The British government hoped that at least 50,000 men could be rescued. In fact, the number reached 340,000. The successful evacuation was due partly to the bravery of the many rescue vessels as well as the protection given by the RAF to the troops on the Dunkirk beaches. Hitler helped by his decision to stop the advance of the German tanks. Moreover, he made another error when he ordered the advancing German armies to capture Calais rather than move on to Dunkirk. It has been estimated that the action as Calais gave the British three extra days to evacuate their forces at Dunkirk.

The British government, especially Churchill, portrayed the Dunkirk evacuation as a great success in order to create what became known as the Dunkirk spirit' and keep up morale. Churchill played up the role of the small boats during the evacuation.
In reality, it was an embarrassing defeat. The BEF had fled from the advancing German armies and left the French to their fate. Huge amounts of military equipment had to be abandoned including 475 tanks, 1,000 heavy guns and 400 anti-tank guns. Britain also lost 70,000 men and 200 fighter planes.

The BBC news on 31 May reported the evacuation like this:

> All night and all day men of the undefeated British Expeditionary Force have been coming home. From interviews with the men it is clear they have come back in glory; that their morale is as high as ever, and that they are anxious to be back again 'To have a real crack at Jerry'.

This was what became known as the 'Dunkirk Spirit', but in fact it was a sign that the newspapers and the BBC were heavily censored during the Second World War. They were banned from publishing stories that might destroy people's morale. This became even more important during the Battle of Britain and the Blitz later in 1940.

For a detailed account of the Dunkirk operation and photographs, click here

To watch an animation showing the Dunkirk campaign, click here

Churchill

Within a month of Dunkirk, France had surrendered. Britain stood alone against Hitler from June 1940 to June 1941, the German invasion of the Soviet Union. British survival was due to the leadership of Churchill, the support of the USA and victory in the Battle of Britain.

Neville Chamberlain had been forced to resign in May 1940 after the failure of the British to prevent the German occupation of Norway. He had been replaced by Winston Churchill who had much greater experience of war, having been First Lord of the Admiralty in the early years of the First World War. He inherited a very perilous position, with the evacuation of Allied forces at Dunkirk followed shortly by the fall of France.

Churchill provided the strong leadership needed during this difficult period. He created the 'Dunkirk spirit', cleverly turning a military defeat into a propaganda victory. Churchill kept up the morale of the British people and made them believe in ultimate victory with speeches and tours of the country. He was said to have 'mobilised the British language'. There was no talk of defeat or surrender. Churchill rejected peace terms offered by Hitler and chose to fight on.

This is an extract from a speech Churchill gave to the House of Commons, 4 June, 1940.

> We shall defend our island, whatever the cost may be. We shall fight on the beaches, we shall fight on the landing grounds, we shall fight in the fields and in the streets, we shall fight in the hills. We shall never surrender.

Churchill began to prepare for invasion. Over a million men joined the volunteer defence force called the Home Guard. Road signs were painted out and the names of railway stations removed. Churchill also encouraged closer relations with and support from the USA. This was helped by his own background – his mother was American. Although the USA was neutral at this time, the American president, Roosevelt, sympathised with Britain and was prepared to give assistance.

As early as September 1940 55-year-old US warships were given to Britain in return for a lease on certain air and naval bases. Of even greater significance was 'Lend Lease'. In March 1941, Roosevelt persuaded Congress to 'lend' equipment to Britain during the duration of the war. This enabled Britain to get essential supplies from the USA and boosted the morale of the British people who no longer felt totally alone.

The Battle of Britain

During the summer of 1940 Hitler prepared for 'Operation Sealion', the invasion of Britain. Invasion barges were assembled on the north coast of France. However, he needed control of the Channel and the air space over Britain to protect his seaborne invasion forces. The Luftwaffe tried to destroy the RAF in August-September 1940 in what became known as the Battle of Britain.

From 13 August the Luftwaffe launched full-scale attacks on the south-east of England, targeting British ports and radar stations. Five days later they switched to fighter bases and by early September the position looked grim for the British who had used up all their reserves of fighter planes and were close to defeat. However, then Hitler made a big mistake. He switched from the fighter bases of Kent to the bombing of London. This gave the RAF a vital breathing space.

The decisive battle took place on the 15 September when the Luftwaffe made its supreme effort with an all-out assault on London in daylight. The Germans lost 56 planes and called off their attempt to destroy the RAF. On the 17 September, Hitler postponed the invasion of Britain. Britain had been saved. Churchill paid tribute in the famous words: 'Never in the field of conflict was so much owed by so many to so few'.

The British victory was mainly due to the development of a new defence system based on radar. Radar stations made it possible to track German planes and so to concentrate the defence just where it was needed. British planes were often in the skies and above the German planes as they arrived over Britain. Sector stations acted as the nerve centre for this defence system. They collected information from radar and sent Spitfires and Hurricanes to intercept the German planes. The British victory was also due to the strengths of the RAF and the weaknesses of the Lutwaffe. The two British fighter planes, the Hurricane and Spitfire, were a good match for their German counterpart, the Messerschmitt Me 109.

The British were fighting over their own territory. This meant that British pilots that were shot down could be sent back into conflict. In addition British factories produced an additional 1,836 fighter planes in four months. The possession of 'Ultra', the key to Germany's radio codes, meant that Britain had advance warning of Germany's plans.

On the other hand, the Germans had to fight over Britain. They lost far more pilots because when a German plane went down, the pilot was either killed or taken prisoner. The German fighter planes could only carry limited fuel and could not fly over Britain long enough to protect the German bombers. Goering, the commander of the Luftwaffe, had little understanding of tactics. He underestimated the strength of the RAF, especially the fighter planes. Hitler made the mistake of switching their attacks on 7 September just when the RAF was running out of fighter planes.

The Battle of Britain was Hitler's first real defeat and a morale booster for the British people. Britain was saved from invasion, at least for the time being, as Hitler postponed 'Operation Sealion'. In addition it made Britain more attractive as a future ally of the USA and encouraged Roosevelt to give material assistance.

For a detailed account of the Battle of Britain with photographs, click here and here

For maps illustrating the course of the Battle of Britain, click here

Checkpoint: The Battle of Britain

Why did the RAF win?

Advantages of the RAF	German mistakes and weaknesses

The Blitz

The Blitz was the German bombing of Britain from September 1940 until May 1941. It began after Hitler gave up his attempt to invade Britain in September 1940; this had been called 'Operation Sealion'. He was trying to force Britain to surrender. The Blitz was really intended to break the morale of the British people. If they saw their homes being destroyed and their loved ones being killed, Hitler believed that they would force the government to come to terms with him. The Blitz was also an attempt to destroy industry. In London the docks were attacked regularly and this meant that people living in the East End were often bombed. The Luftwaffe, the German airforce, also tried to hit railway lines and junctions.

A photograph taken in London on 7th September 1940

The winter of 1940-41 was very difficult, as bombing destroyed homes, lives and families. Every major town and city in the British Isles was attacked. In 1941 the bombing slackened off as Hitler prepared to attack the Soviet Union. The worst affected city was London, where 13,000 people were killed in 1940. In the rest of Britain about 10,000 people were killed. Coventry was hit by a very heavy raid in November 1940, which destroyed the centre of the city and killed about 500 people. Belfast was not bombed until April 1941, when the 'Belfast Blitz' killed nearly one thousand people.

Despite the precautions, however, the effects of bombing were much more devastating than had been anticipated. This was partly because the period of the Phoney War had led people to believe that there would be little actual fighting, but also because there was no slow build-up of bombing.

When it started in September 1940, the Blitz came without warning. Bombing came in several forms. The most common bombs were incendiaries. These were small bombs which burst into flames. The Germans also used high explosive bombs, weighing 500 or 1,000 pounds, but the most dangerous were land mines, which drifted down on parachutes and exploded later. At first bombing was concentrated on central London, particularly the docks. German planes followed the line of the Thames and then dropped their bombs on the East End. Damage was severe, not only to buildings, but also to morale, which was Hitler's main aim.

The government attempted to maintain morale by publishing stories, which created the impression that 'Britain could take it'. However, the truth was often very different. In fact there are many examples of people being very near to total despair in the

winter of 1941. The Blitz had much more devastating effects than the government was prepared to admit.

In October 1940 Balham underground station was hit by a bomb, which burst a water main. Sixty-four people were drowned. This story was never released until after the war, because many people sheltered from air-raids in underground stations. If they had found out what had happened there might well have been panic. Other underground stations were hit, including Piccadilly and Acton. The government also attempted to create the impression that Britain could take it for the USA. US newsreels showed the people of London getting on with the job after nights of destruction.

For more information on the Blitz, click here

Checkpoint: The Blitz

The government attempted to maintain morale by publishing stories of bravery and determination, which created the impression that 'Britain could take it'. Photographs were published in newspapers of smiling people clearing up after the night before.

The Daily Herald published this account of an air raid on 9 September 1940.

East London paused for a moment yesterday to lick its wounds after what had been planned by Hitler as a night of terror. But it carried on.

During a five hour tour of the bombed area, I met only one person who was fed up – a youth who complained that there were not enough shelters.

The purpose of this article was clear. The government was desperate to maintain the morale of the British people in the face of the effects of mass bombing. However, the truth was often very different. In fact there are many examples of people being very near to total despair in the winter of 1941. The Blitz had much more devastating effects than the government was prepared to admit.

This is part of an official report describing the situation in the East End of London in September 1940. It gives a completely different picture of the effects of the Blitz from the official line.

The whole story of the last weekend has been one of unplanned hysteria. The newspaper versions of life going on normally in the East End are greatly distorted. There was no bread, no milk, no telephones. There is no humour or laughter. There was thus every excuse for people to be distressed. There was no understanding in the huge government buildings of central London for the tiny crumbled streets of massed populations.

Other attacks

Coventry suffered its worst attack on the night of 14 November 1940, being hit by 30,000 incendiary bombs, with the target being its aircraft factories. Much of the city, including the cathedral, was destroyed. People were so terrified that they fled the city each night, sleeping with relatives or in farmers' barns or camping in open fields. Yet in spite of this savage raid, the factories in Coventry were back in full production within five days.

The north-west, and Manchester in particular, was attacked in December 1940. Liverpool was attacked regularly and on 3 May 1941 suffered the biggest single raid on a mainland city, involving 500 bombers. The city lost some of its finest buildings with fires burning out of control because water mains were hit. A freighter, the SS Malakand, carrying 1000 tons of explosives, received a direct hit. The docks around the ship and the nearby packed terraced homes were devastated. Other notable targets included Hull, Plymouth, Bristol and Birmingham. Glasgow and Clyde shipyards were hit hard in the spring of 1941. Belfast was devastated in April and May 1941. At least 1000 people were killed and 150,000 made homeless

The effects of the Blitz

The effects of bombing on industry were not severe. Most German bombing was at night and was indiscriminate and failed to put industry out of action. Most factories were able to resume production within two to three days of being hit.

From early 1941 attacks on Britain became less serious. The last major attack was the Belfast Blitz in April 1941, which killed more than a thousand people. It did not greatly reduce the production of factories, and damage to transport was quickly repaired.

The Blitz did less damage than many people had expected. It did not destroy the morale of the population. If anything, it made those affected even more determined to support the war. However over 3 million homes were destroyed and 20,000 people were killed.

Checkpoint: The effects of the Blitz

Fact or Fiction

Fact	Fiction

V1s and V2s

In 1944 and 1945 Britain was attacked from the air once again. About 20,000 people were killed in these attacks. The first attacks came from pilot-less rocket planes called V1s. These could be launched from railway trucks which were moved from place to place. Each rocket carried about one tonne of explosive and when it ran out of fuel it fell to the ground and exploded. V1s flew at about 350 miles per hour and could be shot down, but the resulting explosion could be very dangerous. One Mosquito, the fastest RAF plane at the time, had all its paint stripped off after shooting one down.

Some pilots attempted to bring the V1s down over open country by flying alongside them and tipping them over with the end of their wing. This upset the balance of the V1, which was controlled by a gyroscope. The most successful method of dealing with the V1, however, was to move most of the anti-aircraft guns around London down to the south coast and shoot down the rockets as they came over.

V2s were a much more serious threat. They were real rockets, which were fired from sites in Holland. They could not be shot down and there was no defence against them. The attacks were only stopped when the launch sites were overrun in 1945.

For more information about V1 and V2s and photographs, click here

Key Topic 3: Britain at War

The role of government, food supplies and rationing

The role of government greatly expanded during the Second World War to cover all aspects of life, including rationing, censorship and propaganda. The Emergency Powers Act was introduced by the government in May 1940, after the British army was forced to retreat from Dunkirk and there was a real threat of invasion. This was a time of desperation with France on the verge of defeat and every likelihood of a German invasion. The Act provided the government with almost unlimited powers. From then civilians could be required to do anything and be sent anywhere.

Censorship and propaganda

The government again had emergency powers which enabled it to control information and ensure that the press did not publish and the BBC did not broadcast any information that might be helpful to the enemy or might lower morale. Newspapers were carefully controlled and had to submit their articles to the censor before they were printed. One newspaper, the Daily Worker, was banned in 1941 because it claimed that employers were making a lot of money out of the war by exploiting their workers. The BBC was not controlled by the government but did censor itself.

Propaganda was used in Britain during WWII to boost morale, maintain public support for the war effort and also to provide people with important information and instructions. However, conscription meant it was not necessarily to use it to encourage volunteers for the armed forces. Unlike the First World War, the Ministry of Information (MoI) decided against exaggerating victories or enemy activities. Instead the MoI tried to get across the truth about the horrors of war and avoid giving the public any false hopes of victory. However, its early efforts were seen by the public as dull and uninspiring.

Posters were also used, as they had been in the First World War, to encourage people to conserve food or fuel. In addition, wartime propaganda made good use of the image of the prime minister, Winston Churchill to inspire support for the war effort and keep up morale. This was particularly important in the months after the Dunkirk evacuation and the defeat of France, when Britain stood alone against Germany.

The BBC played an important role in keeping up morale. By the end of the war, an estimated 25 million people were listening to their programmes. They were selective in what they broadcast. For example, their propaganda broadcasts did much to transform the military disaster at Dunkirk into a morale-boosting triumph By mentioning the bravery of the rescue operation and ignoring the humiliation of defeat and retreat. They used entertainment, especially humour and jokes about wartime hardships and Hitler to try to keep the public cheerful.

CARELESS TALK COSTS LIVES

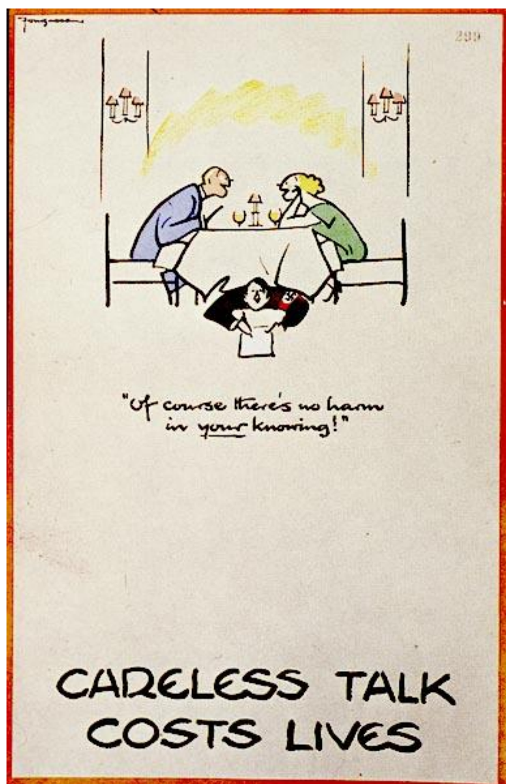
COUGHS AND SNEEZES SPREAD DISEASES

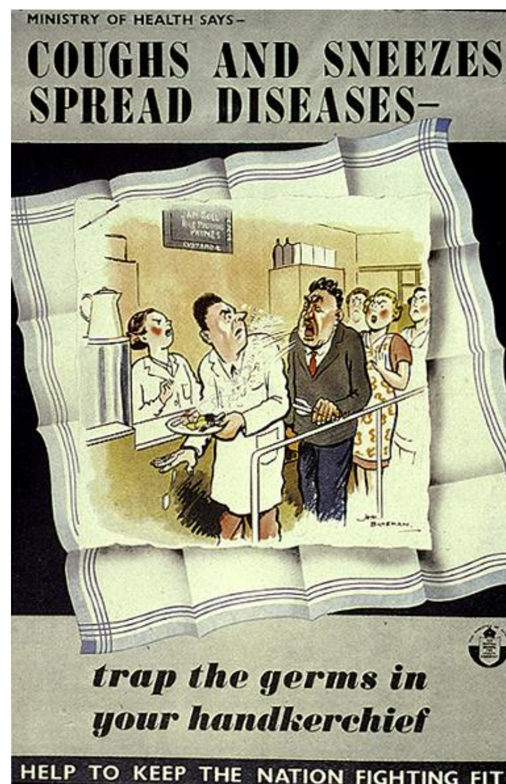
DIG FOR VICTORY

KEEP MUM, SHE'S NOT SO DUMB

LEND A HAND ON THE LAND

LOOK OUT IN THE BLACKOUT





For more propaganda posters, click here

Checkpoint: Propaganda

Aims	Methods

Food supplies and rationing

Food supplies to Britain were seriously threatened by the German U-Boat campaign, which was very successful in sinking Allied merchant ships in the first three years of the war. The government was much quicker to introduce compulsory rationing during the Second World War. In January 1940, the Ministry of Food under Lord Woolton worked out fair food rations. At first only butter, sugar and bacon were rationed.

Rationing was introduced for a number of reasons. One was to ensure that there were adequate supplies of food. Britain in 1914 and 1939 only produced about 45|% of its food supply, the rest was imported. Britain had been threatened with starvation during the Napoleonic Wars and it was an obvious way of attacking the country.
A second reason was to keep up morale up by ensuring that everybody received equal amounts, King George VI allowed his ration book to be published and kept to the limits set.

A third reason was to try to ensure that people in Britain were as healthy as possible; this had two purposes, not only would people be fit to work, but they would also needs little hospital care or other medical treatment. Both of these would help the war effort tremendously as there were bound to be many urgent casualties from bombing.

A committee was set up to decide how much nutrition people in different jobs required. Workers in heavy industry received more, as did pregnant women. Workers in office jobs received less. Everyone was then issued with a ration book and then had to register with a butcher and a grocer. They were then supplied with enough food for their customers. The ration book had to be taken on holidays and given to the landlady or hotel

Special supplements were made available for young children; orange juice and cod liver oil became common and lasted long after the war. The government also produced artificial meats, such as SPAM and MOR. These were made from off-cuts of pork and ham and were tinned. They survived on school dinner menus until well into the 1970s.

To help families, school meals were made available for every child so that mothers could work during the day and not have to worry about their children at lunchtime. British restaurants were opened to give people cheap meals at lunchtime and in the evening. These were 'off the ration'.

Eventually, few foods, except seasonal fruit and vegetables, were not rationed. And rationing soon went beyond food. Almost every other essential article could only be bought with coupons. In other words, even if you were rich, you could not get extra rations because you had the same number of coupons as everyone else, except on the black market. Even the Royal Family had ration books.

Rationing had a profound effect on government policy. Before it had been believed that it was impossible to make major changes to the nation's health. Many politicians did not even believe that it was the government's responsibility. Together with the evidence that evacuation gave of life in the inner cities, rationing helped changed

these views on the role of government. The ease with which the nation's health was improved was noticed by many people, including the playwright George Bernard Shaw. He commented on the improvement in complexions and the reduction in obesity.

The improvements were brought about by changes in diet. Consumption of potatoes rose by 40%, vegetables by 30% and milk by 30%. These changes meant that the British people were eating more healthily than at any other time. In addition, more than 50% of working people began to keep allotments. These were part of the 'Dig for Victory' campaign that encouraged people to grow as much of their own food as possible. By 1943 there were 1,400,000 allotments in Britain. This again increased the amount of fresh food that the British people were consuming.

Rationing had some shortcomings. The rich could buy extra rations on the black market. Vegetables were in much greater supply in rural areas. Very large families with several ration books were better of than small families with one on no children Food supplies were more plentiful and not rationed in certain areas. For example pork and bacon were not rationed in Northern Ireland

For more information about rationing, click here and here

Checkpoint: Rationing

Rationing had positive and negative effects

Positive	Negative

The changing role of women

At the beginning of the war all women were classified as ‘mobile’ or ‘immobile’. Mobile meant that they were capable of joining the armed forces or of undertaking full time war work. Immobile meant that they were housewives looking after children or elderly relatives. Many of these women registered for voluntary work with organisations such as the Women’s Voluntary Service (WVS), but others demanded part time work in industry. The government’s reaction was to ask women to stick to their existing jobs or stay at home. The Ministry of Information issued the following statement.

Nevertheless, despite the rather vague attitude of the government, many women began to work in all kinds of industries. Women were employed in aircraft factories, where they worked a sixteen-hour day seven days a week, without any bank holidays. Many also worked in munitions factories. Others worked as mechanics, lorry drivers and engineers. All women received lower pay than men doing the same work. They also found that the National Insurance Act and the Personal Injuries Act (which gave workers compensation for injuries at work) discriminated against them

The work of women was not properly organised by the government until 1941. In April 1941, all women were forced to register for work, but the real change was brought about by a report published by the Ministry of Labour in October. This showed that 2,000,000 more workers were needed in the armed forces and war industries. In December 1941 conscription of women aged nineteen to thirty was introduced. From then on the number of women steadily increased. By 1943 17,000,000 women aged between fourteen and sixty-four were either in the forces or in essential war work. That included 90% of single women and 80% of married women with children over fourteen.

From a broadcast on the BBC Home Service by a member of the Women’s Institute in May 1941

> Today I am calling all women. Every woman in the country is needed to pull her weight to the utmost. It’s no longer a question of what is the most comfortable arrangement for each family. We are fighting for our lives – for our freedom and our future. We are all in it together. Don’t be afraid of being alone in your sacrifice – however great it may be. All those little things that are so important in every woman’s life – we treasure them and cling to them, they are our life-blood. And now we have got to fight for them. Isn’t it worth it? Together, yes it is.

From an article in the *West Ham Gazette* in 19141; this was written by a female member of the Local Council in West Ham

> How astonishing it is, when the country is in a muddle, how women are regarded as very important. This is not the first time. I did a man’s job in the last was and enjoyed it. Women should get on with the job, do it well, and then ask for the good conditions they are entitled to.

Factory work

1943 was the year when women proved how valuable they were in the war effort. They occupied 57% of the jobs in factories, and, when they were in direct competition with men, often showed that they could do better. The Ministry of Information published details of women's achievements. A woman welder produced 'thirty feet more than a man on similar work'. A woman in a munitions factory produced 120 pieces of equipment a day, compared to 100 by her male colleagues.

But conditions could be very poor, as this description of a new factory in 1942 showed.

Sanitation for 250 workers in our shop is ten washbowls and six lavatories and there is a very bad supply of hot water. We are given five minutes for 250 people to wash and use the lavatories.

One woman worker described her experiences in 1942.

Working in factories is not fun. To be shut in for hours on end without even a window to see daylight was grim. The noise was terrific and at night when you shut your eyes to sleep all the noise would start again in your head. Night shifts were the worst. The work was very often monotonous. I think boredom was our worst enemy.

Many of the women working in factories faced a twelve-hour day in places a long way from home. The new munitions factories were often built in remote areas, to avoid the risk of bombing, where travel was difficult. Pay for women was also lower than for men, usually about 75% of a man's wage. In engineering women earned 43 shillings (£2.15) a week when they started, compared to a man's pay of sixty five shillings and sixpence (£3.28). What made this worse was that women away from home often had to live in hostels, which could cost them 25 (£1.25) or 30 shillings (£1.50 a week). This made it impossible to save money for a visit home.

An Equal Pay Commission was set up in 1943, but it had no powers. By the end of the war women were no nearer equality with men in pay than they had been in 1939, unless they were on piece rates. That would mean that they were paid for every item that they produced, and not for the number of hours that they worked. In 1946 a Royal Commission on Equal Pay reported that women should be given equal pay with men.

Women at home were not better treated. The lowest ranks in the armed forces were only paid two shillings a day in 1939. That meant 70p a week. A wife with two children received a weekly allowance £1.25 at a time when wages ranged from £3-£10. Not until 1943 were wives of servicemen paid a War Service Grant of £3 a week.

The Land Army

80,000 women volunteered to work in the Land Army. British farming had somehow to produce as much food as possible to try to prevent the country being starved to

death. During the war an extra 27,000,000 acres were ploughed up for arable. Land girls were often badly treated. One woman described her work in 1941.

> In a large farm in Lincolnshire we worked for twelve hours a day at very hard and monotonous work and received no training. Wages were 28 shillings (£1.40) a week, out of which we had to pay £1 for our billets. At a smaller farm in Huntingdon where we expected to be trained in tractor driving we were made to do odd jobs, including kitchen work for the farmer's wife. The farmer gave us no training and refused to pay us any wages.

A woman describes her experience during the war. She was speaking in 1983.

> I was sent to a farm in Essex. There were four of us in a gang assigned to an old steam tractor with a threshing machine behind. It was very hard work. We had to go where the work was and sometimes we biked eight miles or so before beginning and eight miles back at night. Later I planted potatoes, and after a year I changed to forestry.

> The people were very resentful in the country, they didn't make it easy for you, we weren't really welcome. All we had in the Army digs were sausages, every day for nine months, she used to cook them in water, they were horrible. WE were worse treated than the services; there were no canteens or anything.

In the newspapers, however, it was a different story.

> The Land Girls are hard at work in Herefordshire operating excavators on the heavy wasteland in the district. They can cut ditches at a rate of twenty yards an hour

Women in uniform

In the armed forces women began to play a more and more important role. By 1943, there were 443,000 women in the forces. They operated searchlights and barrage balloons and served in anti-aircraft batteries. In the navy they overhauled torpedoes and depth charges and repaired ships. As well as administrative tasks in the army, they also drove convoys, acted as despatch riders and worked in Intelligence.

Many of the code-breakers at Bletchley Park were women. In the Air Transport Auxiliary Service they flew planes to RAF bases. One woman later explained how she had to be able to fly twenty-nine different planes. This was no easy feat when all flying was manual. Many women also entered the voluntary services, although there was opposition to them at first.

As the war progressed, attitudes to women changed. In 1943 there were 180,000 women in the Civil Defence, which looked after local areas, and 47,000 in the fire services. 130,000 women served as messengers and despatch riders for the post office. Hundreds of thousands of others worked in auxiliary medical centres, first aid posts, mobile canteens and rest centres. Several million acted as fire-watchers who waited for incendiary bombs to fall and the tried to put out the fires that they started.

Women were not allowed to join the Home Guard, because Churchill did not want women to be involved in the front line, but many women took matters into their own hands and joined the Women's Home Defence Movement. They learnt how to handle firearms and prepared for an invasion. 80,000 women volunteered to work in the Land Army. British farming had somehow to produce as much food as possible to try to prevent the country being starved to death. During the war an extra 27,000,000 acres were ploughed up for arable. Land girls were often badly treated.

Women in the home

But in many ways the biggest challenge facing many women during the Second World War was making the rationing system work. No one ever went short of food, but coping with ration books and rations that could vary from week to week was a major task, especially in a large family. An even bigger task was trying to provide some sort of variety in a diet that largely consisted of green vegetables, potatoes and bread. Manufacturers produced sauces, instant puddings and supplements to try to make the weekly rations look a little more appetising and go a little further.

The government realised that food was very important to morale and supplied hundreds of recipes. The first came out in 'Food Education Memos'. These advised the cook never to mention what was in the meal before it was eaten. Women were also asked to avoid all forms of waste. They were given instructions on how to cook when there was very little gas and what to do when there was an air-raid. What was all the more remarkable, was that the women who were coping with rationing were the same women who were working during the day, doing voluntary work in the evenings and looking after their families. At the end of the war Winston Churchill admitted that without this unseen and unrecognised army of women the war could easily have been lost.

Women were also asked to avoid all forms of waste. They were given instructions on how to cook when there was very little gas and what to do when there was an air-raid.

> If an air-raid signal takes you away from your kitchen for an indefinite time, the first thing to do is stop the heat; if you do this your food cannot get burnt, and we will tell you how to continue the cooking when you come back to the kitchen. An accident, a sudden call for help may call the housewife away from the stove.

A leaflet issued by the Ministry of Food urged women to be careful with rations.

> Spread your rations and allowances so that you get part of each of them every day; making sure that each member of your family gets his proper share. On those days when you have no meat, make up for it with cheese, fish or dried peas or beans cooked with dried eggs or milk. Every day serve a pound of green vegetables, or root vegetables (don't forget swedes, especially when greens are scarce) and a salad.

This newspaper advert was issued during the war.

MEDALS FOR HOUSE-WIVES

THE BRITISH HOUSEWIFE is helping to make a second front — the Kitchen Front — against Hitler. That is why we say "Medals for you, Madam." *Is there anything else you can do?* Read the list of awards below and see how many your household deserves. *More* medals for you, Madam!

A Medal for this . . .
Making delicious dishes from home-grown vegetables, with just a *flavouring* of meat or fish.

A Medal for this . . .
Trying new things — fresh-salted cod for instance — acting on recipes and hints from Kitchen Front Wireless Talks, Food Advice Centres and Ministry of Food Magazine Announcements.

A Medal for this . . .
Saving all bread crusts and crumbs, even the crumbs off plates, drying them in the oven and making crisp rusks or crumbs to use in cooking.

A Medal for this . . .
Never accepting more than the rations; and going without rather than pay unfairly high prices for foods that may be scarce.

A Medal for this . . .
Serving larger portions of vegetables than usual; because more are needed to get the same amount of nourishment that used to be had from the scarcer, concentrated kind of foods. Serving three or four different kinds of vegetables at the same meal, and dressing them up with different sauces to get variety.

For more information about women during the war, click here

Checkpoint: Women during the Second World War

Was the work of women during the Second World War highly valued?

Yes	No

Women after the war, 1945-51

On 8 May 1945, the war in Europe came to an end. Although fighting went on in the Far East until August, for most of the people of Britain VE (Victory in Europe) Day was the end of the conflict. It meant that the risk of bombing had come to and end and with it all of the restrictions and regulations that had come to be such an important part of life over the last six years. The end of the war was greeted with great relief and rejoicing. The British people had faced the test and had won. For most people the one thing that they wanted was to get back to normal. But for any many of the people who had given so much to the war effort, peace proved to be something of a disappointment, as one woman welder in a ship yard found out several months before the war ended.

> There were twelve women welders in the yard at the time and we were sent for one morning and the personnel officer sat there at his desk. He lifted his head and he said one word “redundant”. That was a new word in our vocabulary. We really didn’t know exactly what it meant. There was no reason given. There was no explanation. There was plenty of work in the yard.

The reason was of course very simple. As the war came to an end, what some women had feared all along actually happened. Many women were sacked so that men could get their jobs back. All over the country, women were dismissed after years of hard work. All kinds of advertisements put pressure on women to go back to the home, just as they had put pressure on women to be careful and not waste anything for the last six years. When women went to Labour Exchanges (the forerunners of job centres), they found that the chances of getting a job were slim. The government stated that men should have priority over women for all jobs.

The official government line was:

> It is doubtless true that there are many jobs done during the war by women for which men are better suited, both mentally and physically. And, if there is to be a nation in the future, there must be children and children mean homes and endless chores. So that there must naturally be a drift back from the services and the factories to domestic work.

In one sense, however, the government’s attitude was understandable and many women accepted it. Men who had been in the forces for years needed and deserved work when they were ‘demobbed’ (demobilised from the army).

The war did change the attitudes of some women. War work gave them far more confidence and self-respect. They became far more confident about themselves and their abilities. Many enjoyed the independence and freedom the war had given them. The trade unions accepted women workers much more readily than they had done in the First World War. The Trades Union Congress (TUC) campaigned to make sure that women were treated the same as men.

However, in most respects the war brought little or no change in the position of women. There was not exactly a revolution in attitudes to women’s role in society.

The majority of men continued to believe that in their traditional roles as wives and mothers and, that once the war ended, they should return to the home. This was not helped by the media which continued to portray women in their stereotyped domestic role.

Most men were not enthusiastic supporters of the new, independent role of women, nor were many women. In 1943 there were eight million women in paid work but this had fallen to six million by 1947. Most women willingly left their wartime jobs because they wanted to return to the home. A government survey of 1947 revealed that 58 per cent of women believed that married women should not go out to work. Many had delayed having children during the war and now decided that they wanted to start families.

Women's career opportunities weren't drastically improved by the war. For example, the new opportunities in areas such as metal manufacturing and engineering only lasted as long as the war. The shutting down of nurseries after the war meant the end of jobs for women with children. They continued to make only slow progress in professions like medicine and law. As late as 1961, only 15 per cent of doctors and 3 per cent of lawyers were women.

The Equal Pay Commission, set up in 1944, reported in 1946. It found that the average male manual worker's wage was £5.70 a week, while the wage for a woman was £3. The Commission did not recommend any changes, suggesting that women did different jobs from men, so equal pay was not an issue. The male was still seen as the main breadwinner.

Checkpoint: Women at the end of the war

Positive improvements	Back to normal

D-Day and the defeat of Germany

British armed forces played an important role in the Normandy invasions of Europe, June 1944, and the eventual defeat of Germany.

Preparations for D-Day

The US General Eisenhower was made Supreme Commander over all the Allied forces. Preparations for D-Day started as early as 1942. They included the choice of where to land. Eventually the Allies chose Normandy because the area was not heavily defended by the Germans, who did not expect a landing here, and had beaches suitable for landing a huge army and equipment. The Germans fully expected the Allies to choose a port such as Calais or Dieppe.

The Allies had to manufacture of a variety of equipment to carry out the invasion and landings. This included two artificial harbours codenamed 'Mulberries' which could be towed across the Channel and used to land trucks, tanks and supplies. Hundreds of thousands of US soldiers came over to Britain. The armed forces were trained in the special techniques of assaulting defended beaches. The USA also sent over huge quantities of military materials including landing craft and gliders. The gliders were to be used to land thousands of troops behind enemy lines before the assaults on the beaches took place.

The Allies bombed the area south of Normandy to destroy bridges over the Seine and Loire, roads and railways to delay the arrival of German reinforcements. They also bombed the Dieppe and Calais area to make the Germans believe that this is where the invasion would take place. They put together the 7000 ships which took part in the invasion, 4000 of which were craft that would land the soldiers and their weapons.

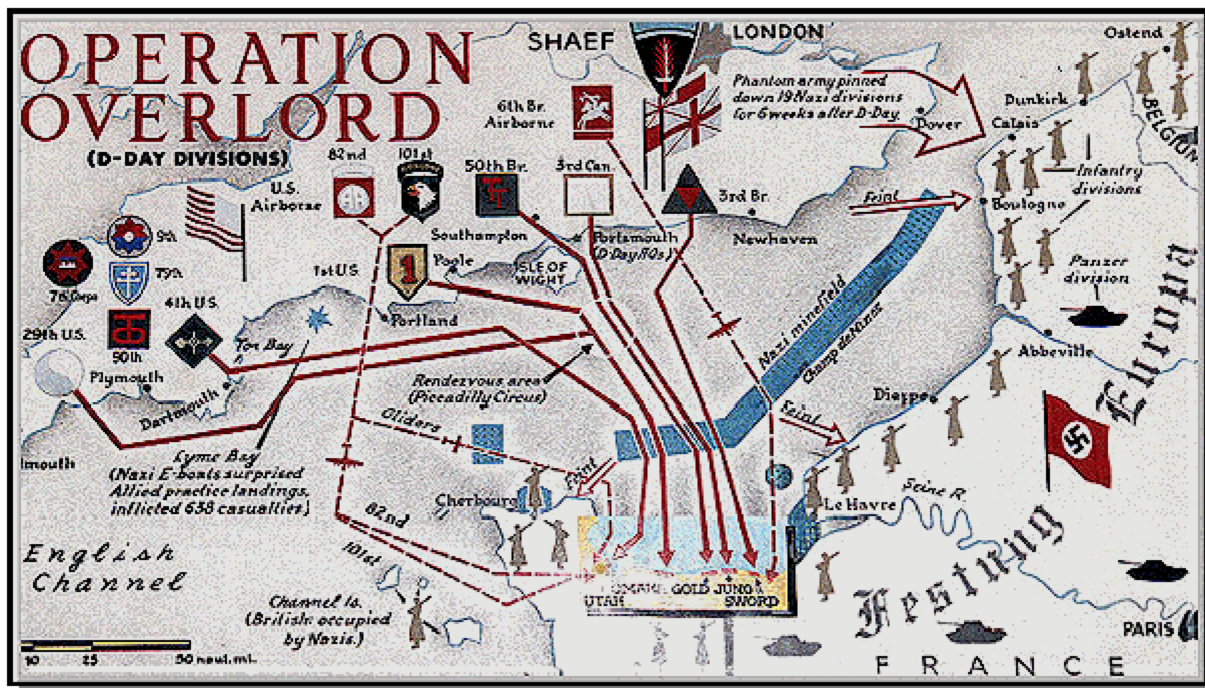
The Landings

The invasion was codenamed 'Operation Overlord' and took place on 6 June 1944 on five beaches all of which were given codenames: the Americans called their two beaches Omaha and Utah; the British and Canadians called their three beaches Gold, Juno and Sword. Allied airborne troops were dropped in advance to seize bridges and protect the flanks of the landings. The navy bombarded the coastline to soften up the German resistance.

At 6.30 am the landings began. On four of the beaches the landings went well, with limited German resistance and few Allied casualties. Indeed by the end of the first day the Allies had landed 156,000 troops with supporting mechanised vehicles. Caught off guard and pinned down by the Allied command of the air, the Germans could not prevent the landings and the establishment of a firm bridgehead large enough to protect the 'Mulberries' from gunfire.

It has been estimated that Allied casualties on D-Day were about 10,000 including 2,500 dead. The heaviest losses were sustained by the US on Omaha beach where they came up against a top division of the German army there on training exercise. There were 3,000 American casualties in the first three hours until the beach was secured.

A map of the landings



For more information about the landings on each of the beaches, click here

For photographs of the landings and the beaches, click here

By the end of July 1944, one million American, British, Canadian, French and Polish troops and hundreds of thousands of vehicles and supporting material had been landed in Normandy.

Why were the landings successful?

The leadership of Eisenhower who turned the invasion forces into a team, and the thorough preparations, planning and training over a two year period. Allied control of the air and sea meant that the landing craft were free from attack. The Allies used the air force to bomb communications in the Normandy area and slow down German reinforcements to the area.

The location of the landings was kept secret. Even after the first landings took place Hitler was convinced that they were a decoy and that Normandy was not the real invasion. As a result, he held back two nearby tank divisions, with over 500 tanks, until it was too late. When he was ready to use them, the British, American and Canadian divisions had established a firm hold on French soil.

Checkpoint: D Day, reasons for success

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Operation Market Garden

Despite capturing the port of Cherbourg on 25 June 1944, the Allies found it difficult to break out of Normandy. A major breakthrough came at Falaise when two German armies were surrounded. After Falaise the Allied advances were rapid and Paris was liberated in August. However, once again the Allied advance was slowed down. This was due to supply problems – as they advanced they moved further away from their supply base at Cherbourg.

The D-Day landings provided the Allies with a much needed foothold in France. Over the next nine months they advanced through France and the Low Countries, eventually crossing the Rhine into Germany in March 1945. The drive to victory, however, did experience setbacks at Arnhem and in the Ardennes.

However, if the war could end quickly then the supply problem would be of little importance. The British General, Montgomery, suggested a plan to hasten the end of

the war, which was code named ‘Operation Market Garden. It was to be an airborne attack behind enemy lines to secure the key bridges across the Rhine. This would enable Allied forces to advance rapidly northwards and move into the lowlands of Germany, outflanking their defences. If the plan worked, the Allies would be in Berlin by Christmas 1944.

The operation began on 17 September 1944 with more than 30,000 British and US airborne troops flown behind German lines to capture the eight bridges across the rivers on the Dutch/German border and hold them until ground forces arrived. The ground advance linked up with Americans at Eindhoven and Nijmegen, but failed by a narrow margin to reach the British at Arnhem. After a week’s heavy fighting they had to withdraw with the loss of half their troops. Logistical problems such as poor radio communication, bad weather and poor intelligence which failed to detect the presence of the 2nd SS Panzer Corps all contributed to the failure of the operation. The general but slow advance towards the Rhine continued.

For more information about Operation Market Garden, click here

For photographs, click here

The Battle of the Bulge

This was Hitler’s last gamble to avoid defeat. By extending the age-limits of military service to 16 and 50 he raised three-quarters of a million troops. He concentrated his limited resources of oil, tanks and aircraft on one last offensive. Hitler wanted to split the Allied forces and prevent them using the port of Antwerp. The Allies were still experiencing supply problems. He decided to launch an attack in the Ardennes, the location of his success in 1940 and the junction of the British and American armies. If successful, Hitler hoped that Britain and the USA would make a separate peace, independent of the Soviet Union.

On 16 December 1944, 30 German divisions attacked the Americans and almost broke through. The Americans were taken by surprise and driven back 40 miles in places. The initial German success was due to the element of surprise, with the Americans relaxing and not expecting a German attack. Moreover, the December mists meant that US planes failed to detect the German build up. However, there was no German breakthrough to Antwerp. American troops held on to the vital road-centre at Bastogne whilst powerful forces were moved up to attack the bulge created by the original German offensive.

The Battle of the Bulge had several important results. It further delayed the Allied advance to Berlin. It took until the end of January to recover the lost land. It meant that Russian troops would reach Berlin first. Hitler had used up his last reserves of planes and tanks and they could not be replaced. Not until March 1945 was the Rhine crossed, when the Americans seized the bridge at Remagen. General Paton forced a crossing at Mainz on 22 March and Montgomery one near Wessel the day after. The German armies began to disintegrate.

For more information about the Battle of the Bulge, click here

Key Topic 4: Labour in Power, 1945-51

Labour comes to power

The 1945 general election produced a massive landslide victory for the Labour Party, with Labour winning 393 seats to the 213 of the Conservatives. There were several reasons why The Labour Party won so convincingly.

Churchill's popularity as a wartime leader did not carry over to peacetime. Many, especially in the working class, remembered his attitude during the General Strike of 1926 when he showed no sympathy for the miners. His comment that a Labour Government might have to fall back on 'some sort of Gestapo' did not go down well. The Conservative Party was also associated with the grim depression of the 1930s and with the policy of appeasement which failed to prevent the outbreak of the Second World War.

In 1945, there was a powerful feeling in Britain for reform – for widespread economic and social reform, encouraged by the sacrifices of the Second World War and the Beveridge Report. This would not be provided by the tired Conservative Party. The Labour leader, Attlee, struck just the right note with the electorate of calm assurance and confidence. Moreover, Attlee and other Labour leaders had played a crucial role in the Churchill wartime government as well as gaining much needed government experience. Morrison, Bevin and Cripps were now household names. Labour seemed to be the party promising change and was not associated with the mistakes of the 1930s. It was judged as best fitted to undertake the task of reconstruction and reform.

The Welfare State became one of the big issues in the general election in 1945. Clement Attlee, the leader of the Labour Party, announced that it would accept all the proposals of the White Papers and set up a Welfare State if it won the election. The Conservatives stated that they accepted all of the proposals, but that putting them into practice immediately would be very difficult. Winston Churchill, in an unguarded moment, said he opposed the idea of a Welfare State. This made many people vote Labour.

A further important reason was the poor electioneering of the Conservative Party who underestimated the quality of their Labour rivals. They also used candidates of lesser quality as many people were still in the armed forces.

Responding to Beveridge: the attack on want

In July 1940 the writer J.B. Priestley had written:

> I will tell you what we did for servicemen and their young wives at the end of the last war. We did nothing. After the cheering and the flag waving was over, and all the medals were given out, somehow the young heroes disappeared, but in a year or two there were a lot of shabby men about, who didn't seem to have been lucky in the scramble for jobs.

Priestley summed up how many people had felt at the end of the First World War. This time, people believed, the opportunity should not be missed. So the British Government asked Sir William Beveridge to lead a Royal Commission to consider how Britain should be rebuilt after the war. The Beveridge Report was published in 1942. It became a best seller.

The Beveridge Report, 1942

By 1942, there was even more powerful evidence for the need for change. Evacuation had showed just what the lives of some people in Britain were like. Many evacuees were in very poor health. The reports published by the Women's Institute that described the physical state of many evacuees. They revealed that they suffered from infestations of lice and many diseases caused by malnutrition.

Rationing had shown that government intervention could be effective. Beforehand some politicians had stated that it was impossible to improve the health of the nation; rationing had changed it almost overnight. In addition the government provided dietary supplements for the first time, such as orange juice and cod liver oil. These had major impact on the health of children.

Many people began to think that at the end of the war the government should act to try and guarantee the people of Britain a better life. So in 1941 Sir William Beveridge was asked to prepare a report on what should be done at the end of the war. The Beveridge Report was published in 1942. It became a best seller.

Beveridge recommended that the people of Britain should be protected from Five Giant Evils; Squalor, Ignorance, Want, Idleness and Disease. It went on to explain how this could be done. Beveridge said that the Government should take responsibility for the welfare of the people of Britain, ‘From the Cradle to the Grave’. It recommended that a Welfare State should be set up in Britain.

Beveridge’s aim was to ensure that all people in Britain had an adequate standard of living, regardless of whether they were able to work or not. To achieve this he made five key proposals.

- The National Insurance scheme must be extended to cover people.
- There should be a standard insurance contribution which all people would pay and a standard benefit which all could claim.
- Benefits would be paid indefinitely.
- Family allowances would be paid for every child.
- There should be a National Health Service that was completely free.

To ensure that the Welfare State worked effectively, Beveridge included two key principles in his plans. Firstly, he wanted the establishment of a ‘National Minimum’. This would a standard of living below which nobody in Britain would be allowed to fall. To achieve this, benefits would have to be paid to raise people above the National Minimum irrespective of whether they were in work or not. This was not a concept that had been included in the Liberal Reforms from 1906 to 1914, and it aroused opposition from some MPs, particularly Conservatives, who believed that benefits should only be paid when an individual was unable to work.

Beveridge's second key principle was 'universality'. This meant that benefits should be available to everyone, regardless of wealth, income or social status. Therefore, child benefit would be available to every family, no matter how wealthy. This was a direct reversal of the means test, one of the most unpopular of the measures introduced in the 1930s.

For more information about William Beveridge, click here

Checkpoint: The Beveridge Report

Why was it so popular?

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The Report was greeted with great enthusiasm by the Labour Party, but Winston Churchill, the leader of the Conservatives was more sceptical. Many of its recommendations became the foundations for the Labour measures of 1945-51. The main parts of the Welfare State, the National Insurance Act, the National Health Service Act, the Industrial Injuries Act and the National Assistance Act, were all passed in 1946.

The Acts came into operation in 1948. Because the Welfare State would require a great deal of planning, a day was fixed for the start of the new system. This became known as the 'Appointed Day', 5 July 1948.

The National Insurance Act

All people, except married women, had to join the National Insurance scheme. They paid 4 shillings and eleven pence (about 25p) a week, and their employer and the government also paid contributions. This entitled the person to every benefit provided by the Welfare State. Unemployment pay was 26 shillings (£1.30) a week, with 16 (80p) shillings for a wife and 7 shillings and six pence (33p) for a child. Old Age Pensioners received 42 shillings (£2.10) for a married couple.

Benefits included sickness and unemployment widow's pensions, maternity allowance and a death grant to cover funeral expenses. All benefits were paid to everybody at a flat rate, which means that everybody got the same mount. There was no limit to the length of time for which they could be claimed, with the exception of unemployment benefit, which ended after 180 days
.
So although Beveridge's principle of unlimited benefits was put into practice in most cases, in the most important instance it was not. The difference between the provision of sickness benefit and unemployment benefit, which had existed since 1912, continued for the time being at least.

National Assistance

National Insurance covered all 25,000,000 workers in Britain. Anyone who was not insured; people who could not work, for example, could apply to the National Assistance Board for help. They would have to take a means test (prove that they really needed help), but that only applied to the person applying, and not to the whole family as it had done in the 1930s. Once again, Beveridge's principle was ignored in the cases of the people who were least able to do anything to help themselves.

Family Allowances

To improve the standard of living a family allowance was set up in 1945 and the first payments were made in 1946. A family received 25p a week for each child after the first until the child reached the age of 16 or was employed full time. There was no Means Test. All families received the benefit.

The NHS

This account, describing medical treatment before and after the creation of the NHS was written by a doctor who joined the NHS in 1948.

> People always managed to find money to bring in their children. But mothers would go without. When the NHS came along all of that changed. Within six months I had 30 to 40 women come in who had been suffering from gynaecological problems, many of them for years – women with a complete prolapse of the uterus who'd been wearing nappies and towels to hide the problem.

This account was written in the 1980s by a woman who had experienced medical treatment both before and after the setting up of the NHS. Her story must have been typical of many in the 1930s and 1940s.

> Dad had a small wage and thought that with a family of four children to bring up, it was too much for him to be able to go to the doctor. He used to buy some concoction from the chemist at sixpence a bottle. That eased the pain in his stomach. But when he went on the National Health Service, this was thoroughly investigated, and they found that Dad hadn't a stomach upset, Dad had cancer. Had it been treated earlier, it could have been cured but unfortunately, due to the expensive doctors, Dad had not had this looked into before, and we lost Dad, Dad died of cancer.

Aneuran Bevan, the Minister of Health, was responsible for improving the nation's health. In 1946 he introduced the National Health Act. Bevan's NHS Bill contained four proposals that had not been included before. Firstly, all hospitals would be taken over and put under thirteen regional health boards. These in turn would be controlled by the Ministry of Health. Secondly, all doctors would be paid a salary, instead of receiving fees for each of their patients. Thirdly, doctors would not be allowed to set up new practices in areas where there were already enough doctors. Instead they would be encouraged to move to areas where there were insufficient doctors. Lastly, doctors would not be allowed to buy and sell practices and with them lists of patients.

Opposition to the NHS Bill

These proposals were the subject of ferocious attacks from the medical professions. The BMA, which represented 51,000 GPs and hospital doctors, threatened to boycott the NHS if Bevan's plans went through unchanged. The BMA set up a campaign to fight the NHS Bill. It was led by two doctors, Guy Dain and Charles Hill. The latter was well known as the 'Radio Doctor'. He had made many broadcasts answering questions on the BBC. Hill was also used by the Conservative Party in its campaign against the NHS.

Two letters to the BMJ in 1946 show how strongly many doctors felt.

> I have examined the National Health Service Bill and it looks uncommonly like the first step, and a big one, towards National Socialism as practised in Germany. The medical services there were put under the dictatorship of a 'Medical Führer'. This Bill will establish the Minister of Health in that capacity.

The Bill can be written in two lines: I hereby take whatever powers to do whatever I like about the medical services of the country – signed Nye Bevan, Führer

Bevan, a left-winger in the Labour Party, was likened to Adolf Hitler because of the way he was attempting to enforce changes without consultation. Two letters to the BMJ in 1946 show how strongly many doctors felt. Bevan's response was to take a more moderate line. He knew that without the support of doctors the NHS would not work and so attempted to undermine the opposition by compromises. He started with the Royal Colleges of Surgeons, Physicians and Obstetricians. These bodies represented the consultants, most important figures in the medical professions. Bevan made two important concessions. Consultants would be able to work part-time for the NHS and so continue with their private patients. They would also be able to use private beds in NHS hospitals to treat their private patients.

These concessions won over the consultants, but Bevan was still faced with the opposition of the BMA and its 51,000 members. In 1947 a poll organised by the BMA showed that 40,814 doctors were against joining the NHS, while only 4,735 were in favour. Somehow or other, Bevan had to overcome that majority by the 'Appointed Day'. Bevan also won over the BMA. Firstly, he agreed that doctors would not be paid solely by a salary; they would also receive a fee for every patient on their list.

Bevan also agreed that doctors who joined the NHS would be able to retain private patients and the fees that they received for treating them. He did not, however, compromise on the right of doctors to sell their practices. Instead he set up a compensation fund, which provided them with a cash sum when they retired.

Finally Bevan also began a publicity campaign amend it soon became obvious that the British public was giving overwhelming support to the NHS. Doctors who opposed the NHS were, therefore, faced with a simple choice. If they refused to join, they could well lose large numbers of patients to doctors who had joined.

Launching the NHS, 1948

From the Appointed day, everyone in Britain was entitled to completely free medical care. This included visits to doctors, prescriptions, hospital treatment and operations, emergency services, dental treatment and false teeth, opticians and free spectacles and vaccinations and clinics. All the hospitals in the country (about 3,000) were taken over by the government and doctors were paid by the state. General Practitioners (GPs) were paid a fee for every patient that they had, no matter how many visits he or she made to the surgery.

Suddenly people's lives began to change. They could now go to the doctor whenever they were ill without worrying about having to pay. It made a huge difference to their lives. In 1948 there was a big rush for these services for the first time. Many people had put off going for treatment because of the cost.

The impact of the NHS

In October 1949, the Minister for Health, Aneurin Bevan announced what had happened since July 1948:187,000,000 prescriptions had been provided; 5,250,000 pairs of glasses had been prescribed and 8,500,000 people had been treated at dentists

The GP soon became the 'Family Doctor'. Not somebody remote and austere, which people had been frightened to visit because of the likely cost, but somebody who could be called on in adversity. Some elderly people began to make regular visits to their GPs for reassurance and inevitably costs rose. The first charges to be introduced were for dental and optical treatment in 1951. These had proved to be the most costly items in the NHS budget. Nye Bevan resigned in protest.

The most important change after July 1948 was that people no longer had to worry about whether they could afford treatment. In the 1930s many families had saved for their children to be treated and sometimes for the father as he would have to work, but often the mother would go without. The Welfare State put an end to all that. As one writer put it, 'the Welfare State was an enormous sigh of relief'. The impact on serious diseases was also dramatic. By 1961, cases of diphtheria had almost disappeared and cases of tuberculosis had fallen by two-thirds.

In 1951, Seebohm Rowntree carried out a third survey into poverty. He wanted to find out just how difference the Welfare State had made. Despite the failure to put Beveridge's principle of a basic standard of living into practice, Rowntree found that only 1.5% of the people of Britain were living in poverty. However, this figure subsequently rose in the 1950s as benefits lagged behind the rise in the cost of living. By 1953 a quarter of widows and pensioners were applying for extra payments from the National Assistance Board.

There were other criticisms of the NHS. One the one hand some said it encouraged people who wanted something for nothing and that taxpayers' money was being needlessly squandered. Some disliked the fact that there was still private practice. This would lead to twin standards – better care for those that could afford to pay.

Checkpoint: The NHS

Successes	Failures