

## = Rise of Neville Chamberlain =

The early life , business career and political rise of Neville Chamberlain culminated on 28 May 1937 , when he was summoned to Buckingham Palace to " kiss hands " and accept the office of Prime Minister of the United Kingdom . Chamberlain had long been regarded as Prime Minister Stanley Baldwin 's political heir , and when Baldwin announced his retirement , Chamberlain was seen as the only possible successor .

Chamberlain was born in 1869 ; his father was the politician and future Cabinet minister , Joseph Chamberlain . He was educated at Rugby School and Mason College ( now Birmingham University ) ; at neither institution was he particularly successful . After a period in a firm of chartered accountants , the younger Chamberlain spent six years in the Bahamas managing a sisal plantation in a failed attempt to recoup the family fortunes .

After returning to England in 1897 , Chamberlain became a successful businessman in his home city of Birmingham . He was interested in social affairs , and successfully stood for Birmingham City Council in 1911 . He became Lord Mayor of Birmingham in 1915 . His second term was interrupted in December 1916 when Prime Minister David Lloyd George asked him to become Director of National Service . Chamberlain received little support from Lloyd George in the post , and his eight @-@ month tenure sparked a hatred between the two which lasted Chamberlain 's lifetime .

In 1918 , Chamberlain was elected to the House of Commons , at age 49 the oldest man to enter Parliament and later become Prime Minister . After four years on the backbenches , Chamberlain saw rapid promotion , briefly becoming Chancellor of the Exchequer after less than a year as a minister . Chamberlain subsequently spent five years as Minister of Health , securing the passage of many reforming acts . After two years in opposition , Chamberlain became part of Ramsay MacDonald 's National Government , and spent five and a half years as Chancellor , directing Britain 's financial policies as the nation emerged from the Depression . When Baldwin ( who had replaced MacDonald as Prime Minister in 1935 ) retired in 1937 , Chamberlain succeeded him .

## = = Early life = =

Chamberlain was born in a house called Southbourne , in the Edgbaston district of Birmingham , England , as the only son of the second marriage of Joseph Chamberlain , who later became Mayor of Birmingham , and who also served as a Cabinet minister . Joseph Chamberlain had fathered two children by his first marriage , Beatrice and Austen . Joseph 's first wife , Harriet , died giving birth to Austen ; Neville 's mother , the former Florence Kenrick , also died in childbirth in 1875 , when Neville was six years old . Florence Chamberlain left three daughters in addition to Neville and her stepchildren . Joseph Chamberlain , in the midst of a highly successful parliamentary career , was often away , leaving the household in the hands of his sister . Young Neville was sent away to school at age eight .

Chamberlain attended Rugby School . Unhappy during his school years , he made no lasting friendships there . Although he did reasonably well in his classes , he was not outstanding academically or athletically , and his father withdrew him from the school four months short of his eighteenth birthday . In later years , as Chamberlain rose to the heights of British politics , he seldom visited the school , did not enrol his own son , and rarely spoke of his time there . Joseph Chamberlain then sent Neville to Mason College ( which later developed into the University of Birmingham ) , which both emphasised the politician 's connection to Birmingham and catered to the interest in science which Neville had shown at Rugby . Neville Chamberlain studied metallurgy and engineering for two years , but had little interest in the subjects . In 1889 his father apprenticed him to a firm of accountants . Within six months , he became a salaried employee .

## = = Businessman ( 1890 ? 1911 ) = =

Joseph Chamberlain had difficulty living within his means , a problem exacerbated by investment losses in the late 1880s . In 1890 , Sir Ambrose Shea , Governor of the Bahamas , advised him that

growing sisal in the Bahamas could restore the family fortunes . Joseph Chamberlain sent his two sons to the Bahamas to investigate in November 1890 , and they recommended the venture . Neville Chamberlain was assigned to manage the undertaking , and in early 1891 , the 22 @-@ year @-@ old took out a lease on 26 @,@ 000 acres ( 110 km<sup>2</sup> ) on the island of Andros . He spent most of the next six years on Andros . The soil proved to be unsuitable for growing sisal , and the venture failed . Joseph Chamberlain lost £ 50 @,@ 000 ( approximately £ 4 @.@ 2 million today ) . Neville Chamberlain returned to Britain in early 1897 .

Neville Chamberlain resided in his father 's Birmingham house , Highbury , a large part of which was shut up to save on expenses . His father and half @-@ brother spent much of their time in London , where they were serving in the Lord Salisbury Government . Through a family connection , Neville Chamberlain was made a director of Elliot 's Metal Company , which was located within a mile ( 1 @.@ 6 km ) of Highbury . Chamberlain took a hands @-@ on approach , exploring all aspects of the business . In November 1897 , he purchased ( with assistance from his family ) Hoskins & Company , a manufacturer of metal ship berths . Chamberlain served as managing director of Hoskins for 17 years , during which time the company prospered . Chamberlain introduced a profit @-@ sharing scheme at Hoskins which he credited with ensuring industrial peace , and opened a medical clinic for the workers . His business acumen raised him in the eyes of his father , who told a friend that of his two sons , " Neville is really the clever one " and but for his lack of interest in politics , " I would back him to be Prime Minister " .

Chamberlain 's business interests did not completely fill his time , and he indulged his love of natural history and other outdoor pursuits . He spent many Sundays working in the gardens and greenhouses at Highbury . He enjoyed long walks in the countryside , and developed a passion for hunting and fishing . Even as he approached the heights of his political career , he would contribute articles to journals such as The Countryman . In 1931 , he stated , " I really can 't consent to die until they arrange some fishing in the next world . " Chamberlain travelled extensively in Europe and North Africa , made a five @-@ month tour to India , Ceylon and Burma in 1904 ? 05 , and according to his biographer , Robert Self , was one of the more travelled Prime Ministers .

Chamberlain also involved himself in civic activities in Birmingham . In 1906 , Chamberlain was a founding member of the University House Committee at Birmingham University , the president of which was his aunt , Mrs Charles Beale , wife of the University 's first Vice @-@ Chancellor . He became an Official Visitor and then a director of the Birmingham General Hospital . He advocated a larger facility for the hospital , a cause in which he was eventually successful , though building did not commence until 1934 and he was still fundraising as Prime Minister . Stating that he was painfully aware of the defects of his own education , he played a part in the establishment of the University of Birmingham , of which Mason Science College became a part . Joseph Chamberlain became the University 's first chancellor ; Neville Chamberlain was appointed to its Council and later to its Board of Governors .

Though he declared himself uninterested in politics , Chamberlain supported his father 's views loyally . He made speeches in support of British policy towards the Boers and when the Boer War broke out , supported the British war effort . During the " Khaki election " of 1900 he made speeches in support of Joseph Chamberlain 's Liberal Unionists , which were allied with the Conservatives and later merged with them . In 1903 , Chamberlain fell in love with Rosalind Sellar , a London professional singer , and repeatedly journeyed to the capital to be with her . The following year , she decided she preferred another man , leaving Chamberlain distraught . In 1910 , he fell in love with Anne Cole , a distant relative by marriage , and the following year married her . Anne Chamberlain proved to be a loyal supporter of her husband and got along well with his maiden sisters . The two had a son and a daughter , with Neville Chamberlain involving himself deeply in the children 's upbringing .

When he became Prime Minister in 1937 Chamberlain paid tribute to his wife :

I never should have become P.M. if I hadn 't had Annie to help me . It isn 't only that she charms every one into good humour & makes them think that a man can 't be so bad who has a wife like that ... But besides all this she has softened & smoothed my natural impatience and dislike of anything with a whiff of humbug about it and I know she has saved me from making an impression

of hardness that was not intended . "

= = Early political career ( 1911 ? 1922 ) = =

= = = Birmingham politician = = =

While Chamberlain had continued to give speeches at general elections , his entry into politics at age 42 in 1911 stemmed from interest in local politics and the opportunities they offered for social improvement . In 1910 , Chamberlain appeared before a Parliamentary committee , testifying in favour of a bill to merge Birmingham with its suburbs . The bill passed , tripling the size of the city and greatly increasing its population . Chamberlain was very interested in city planning for Birmingham . In November 1911 , standing as a Liberal Unionist , he was elected to Birmingham City Council for All Saints ' Ward , located within his father 's parliamentary constituency . Chamberlain 's party merged with the Conservatives the following year , forming the Unionist Party , which was given its present formal name of the Conservative and Unionist Party in 1925 .

Upon his election , Chamberlain was made chairman of the Town Planning Committee , which sketched out four development schemes covering 15 @, @ 000 acres ( 61 km<sup>2</sup> ) in the city , allowing for suburban development while preserving green space . In 1913 , he led a committee looking at housing conditions in Birmingham . It was a forerunner to the parliamentary Unhealthy Areas Committee ( 1919 ? 21 ) , of which he was chairman . Chamberlain found that over 100 @, @ 000 housing units lacked toilet facilities , with nearly half of those not even having running water . He advocated gradual reorganisation to abate the problem , and warned that the city government must be ready to take over property if the private sector failed . Under Chamberlain 's direction , Birmingham soon adopted one of the first town planning schemes in Britain which would , in time , be mirrored by other large industrial cities such as Liverpool and Leeds . However , the start of war in 1914 prevented implementation of his plans in Birmingham .

With the outbreak of World War I in August 1914 , Chamberlain became deeply involved in the war effort . In addition to his duties as councillor , Chamberlain helped recruit men for the Royal Warwickshire Regiment and set up funds for injured soldiers . Late in 1914 , he became an alderman of Birmingham , and the following year , became Lord Mayor . Chamberlain 's biographer , Robert Self , suggested that as Joseph Chamberlain had died the previous year , the honour was due to Neville Chamberlain 's hard work rather than to any family influence . As a Lord Mayor in wartime , Chamberlain had a tremendous burden of work , and he insisted that his councillors and officials work equally hard . He set up crèches for workers , stockpiled coal to be distributed to the poor at cost in time of shortage , and reinvigorated Birmingham 's various committees , which were ineffective and engaged in wasteful rivalries . He also chaired the local committee evaluating exemptions from conscription , and stated that he was more lenient than were other members of the tribunal . He halved the Lord Mayor 's expense allowance , and cut back on the number of civic functions expected of the incumbent .

Under Chamberlain , the group which became the City of Birmingham Symphony Orchestra was initiated . The Lord Mayor persuaded Sir Thomas Beecham to conduct a series of events in Birmingham . The concerts caused Birmingham to be regarded as a cultural centre , and in 1919 , the Orchestra was formally founded . Chamberlain established the Birmingham Municipal Bank , the only one of its type in the country , which aimed to encourage savings to pay for the war loan . The bank proved highly successful and lasted until 1976 , when it was taken over by Lloyds Bank . Chamberlain was re @-@ elected Lord Mayor in 1916 , but he did not complete his term .

= = = Director of National Service = = =

Conscription for the Army , but not for civilian industry , had been brought in in the first half of 1916 . Towards the end of Asquith 's Government in 1916 a Manpower Distribution Board had been set up under Neville 's brother Austen , but it had no executive powers . After Edwin Montagu had

refused the new position of Director of National Service , as he thought the task of building up a new ministry was beyond him , Chamberlain , who was already nationally known , was proposed for the job by his brother Austen . In December 1916 , the new Prime Minister David Lloyd George offered him the job , with responsibility for co-ordinating conscription and ensuring that essential war industries were able to function with sufficient workforces . Though reluctant to leave his post in Birmingham , Chamberlain accepted and resigned as Lord Mayor .

To a great extent Chamberlain 's actual responsibilities were left vague by Lloyd George . On his appointment Lloyd George implied in the House of Commons that " compulsion " ( the industrial equivalent of conscription ) was to be extended to industry and that Chamberlain would soon produce a system of industrial enrolment . But Chamberlain found his work to be handicapped by the Prime Minister 's political manoeuvres . As Chamberlain sought to maximise the number of workers subject to both conscription and compulsion , Lloyd George pledged to the unions that he would oppose any sort of " industrial conscription " . Although Chamberlain repeatedly made proposals for mandatory service , they were turned down by Lloyd George and his War Cabinet . The Army still controlled its own recruitment at this stage , whilst Chamberlain met with resistance from the Ministries of Munitions and Labour . Chamberlain 's proposal that all men under 21 be drafted from industry into the Army was blocked by Minister of Munitions Addison ( 19 January 1917 ) , as it would have meant conscripting skilled young men who had already spent time in apprenticeships .

Chamberlain was not made a Privy Councillor . He also spurned advice from Lloyd George about his choice of advisors ( apart from James Stevenson from the Ministry of Munitions who was briefly Deputy for Civil Recruiting ) , instead appointing cronies from Birmingham who were as out of their depth as he was . Chamberlain nearly resigned in June 1917 when , having not been told or consulted , he read in the newspapers that he had been given a new Parliamentary Secretary .

Denied the use of compulsion , Chamberlain had to persuade Britons to volunteer for essential war work , and fit young workers to leave the factories and enter the Army . He had to address mass meetings and issue posters . He found that workers were reluctant to exchange the comforts of home and wartime salaries for the uncertainties of the trenches and a wage of one shilling a day . Chamberlain had little confidence in voluntary schemes and they indeed proved unsuccessful , with only 9 @, @ 000 workers freed to be drafted into the Army at a time when Britain was sustaining huge casualties .

Chamberlain finally resigned on 8 August 1917 . He was thanked warmly by the staff at St Ermin 's Hotel where the Ministry was housed . Lloyd George wrote to his family ( in Welsh ) that " Neville Chamberlain has resigned and thank God for that . " He met with considerable sympathy from members of parliament after his resignation . John Dillon , an Irish Nationalist MP , stated that " if Mr. Chamberlain were an archangel , or if he were Hindenburg and Bismarck and all the great men of the world rolled into one , his task would be wholly beyond his powers " . Unionist Party leader Andrew Bonar Law spoke of the " absolutely impossible task " Chamberlain had faced . Auckland Geddes , Chamberlain 's successor , was made a Privy Councillor and had more power and more support from the War Cabinet than he had had .

The relationship between Chamberlain and Lloyd George was thenceforth one of hatred , with Chamberlain calling Lloyd George " that dirty little Welsh Attorney " and being implacably opposed to Lloyd George joining the National Government in the 1930s . Austen Chamberlain , the brother of one opponent and , for a time , the political ally of the other , regretted the enmity , " More 's the pity , for together if they were together they might do a great deal . " Lloyd George would later paint a most unflattering portrait of Chamberlain in his 1935 War Memoirs , claiming that " Mr Chamberlain is a man of rigid competency . Such men have their uses in conventional times ? and are indispensable for filling subordinate posts at all times . But they are lost in an emergency or in creative tasks at any time . " His dislike of Chamberlain is sometimes said to have been based on phrenology , although little contemporary evidence has been found to confirm this . Lloyd George would also have the last laugh in May 1940 , when his speech in the Norway Debate helped bring down Chamberlain 's government .

= = = Candidate and backbencher = = =

Having resigned as Director , Chamberlain returned to Birmingham , embittered by his experience in London . He wrote that the experience " reminds me of the Bahamas when the plants didn 't grow " . He had retained his seat on the City Council and busied himself with his civic duties , as well as his business interests and family life . In February 1918 , having declined a third term as Lord Mayor , he was appointed Deputy Mayor .

Chamberlain had formed a close friendship with his cousin , Norman Chamberlain , who had also served on the City Council and who shared the future Prime Minister 's social ideals . In December 1917 , Norman Chamberlain was reported missing in action during the Battle of Cambrai , and in February 1918 , Norman 's body was found ? a great blow to Neville Chamberlain , who described Norman as " the most intimate friend I had " . Through the rest of his career , Neville Chamberlain laboured to further the ideals of his cousin , and wrote his biography ? the only book he ever wrote . Some historians relate Norman 's death to a hatred of war on his cousin 's part which led to appeasement ; according to Chamberlain 's biographer Nick Smart , the death did not cause Chamberlain to hate World War I , and any influence on his later positions is far from certain .

After some hesitation as to his future career , Chamberlain determined to enter Parliament , though , after his experience with National Service , he feared that he would only have a brief , unsatisfying parliamentary career . Wishing to stand for a Birmingham constituency , he initially had some difficulty in finding one . The Representation of the People Act 1918 gave Birmingham five additional seats , and Chamberlain was adopted as candidate for one of the new seats , Birmingham Ladywood . With the election on hold until the conclusion of the war , he continued his work in Birmingham . Shortly after the Armistice , his sister Beatrice died in the influenza pandemic , and Chamberlain mourned her , " She had the warmest heart . " With the war ended , a general election was called almost immediately . Chamberlain stood as a Unionist ( as the Conservative Party was known from 1912 to 1925 ) and was given the " coupon " or letter of endorsement granted by Coalition party leaders Lloyd George and Andrew Bonar Law to approved candidates , though he declined to make any use of it . He was elected with almost 70 % of the vote and a majority of 6 @,@ 833 . At age 49 , he remains the oldest man to enter Parliament for the first time and later become Prime Minister .

Chamberlain threw himself into Parliamentary work , begrudging the times when he was unable to attend debates and spending much time on committee work . When Austen Chamberlain , Chancellor of the Exchequer in the continued coalition government led by the Liberal Prime Minister , Lloyd George , tried to recruit him to serve on an additional committee , Neville Chamberlain informed his half @-@ brother that he could only serve if it met between midnight and 7 : 30 am . Chamberlain took time to assure the future of the Birmingham Savings Bank , and Parliament passed an act which removed onerous restrictions from the bank . In March 1920 , he was offered a junior post at the Ministry of Health by Bonar Law on behalf of the Prime Minister , but was unwilling to serve under Lloyd George despite Bonar Law 's warnings that Chamberlain , now past fifty , might never be offered another chance to serve in government , as Lloyd George was likely to remain premier for a very long time . Chamberlain was offered no further posts during Lloyd George 's premiership , and when Bonar Law resigned as party leader , Austen Chamberlain took his place as head of the Unionists in Parliament .

Unionist backbenchers had long been restive as Lloyd George granted the Liberals in the Coalition more than their proportionate share of offices . In October 1922 , discontent among Unionists against the Lloyd George Coalition Government erupted . When Unionist MPs were summoned to the Carlton Club for a meeting to receive their instructions for the forthcoming election , which , as in 1918 was to be fought in coalition with the Lloyd George Liberals , they instead rebelled and voted to fight the election as a single party . Lloyd George resigned as Prime Minister . Most Unionist leaders , including Austen Chamberlain , had supported the Coalition and advocated its continuation . They resigned from their government and party offices , with Austen Chamberlain writing , " The meeting today rejected our advice . Other men who have given other counsels must inherit our burden " . Bonar Law was recalled from retirement to lead the Unionists as Prime Minister . Neville

Chamberlain was in Canada at the time of the meeting and so was not forced to choose between supporting his brother's leadership and bringing down a man he despised .

= = Minister ( 1922 ? 1937 ) = =

= = = Bonar Law Government ; early ministerial office = = =

Many frontbench Unionists refused to serve under Bonar Law , who was forced to form his Cabinet from lower @-@ ranking party members . Liberal MP Winston Churchill , who would lose his seat in the upcoming election , dubbed Bonar Law 's ministry " a government of the second eleven " . The conflict amongst the Unionists greatly benefited Neville Chamberlain , who rose , over the course of ten months , from backbencher to Chancellor of the Exchequer .

Bonar Law appointed Chamberlain as Postmaster General , a ministerial post below Cabinet level . Bonar Law called an election shortly after his accession , which the Unionists won , and Chamberlain was re @-@ elected , though his prediction that his seat was " safe as houses " proved dubious ? his majority was reduced to 2 @,@ 443 . In January 1923 , Chamberlain granted the first operating licence to the British Broadcasting Company , though he opposed its request to broadcast the King 's Speech setting forth the Government 's programme in opening Parliament . Chamberlain feared that allowing the speech to be aired would lead to broadcast of parliamentary debates over the radio , " a prospect which makes one shudder " .

Sir Arthur Griffith @-@ Boscawen , the Minister of Health , had lost his seat in the 1922 General Election and failed to win a by @-@ election in March 1923 : Housing fell within the remit of the Minister of Health . As Chamberlain had experience in developing housing programmes in Birmingham , Bonar Law offered the Health Ministry , within the Cabinet , to him . Chamberlain was initially reluctant , feeling that he should not leave the Post Office before he " had a chance of doing something there " , but decided that " it would not be playing the game " to refuse Bonar Law 's request . There was a great shortage of housing in Britain as a result of pent @-@ up demand from the war years , and almost all housing was rent controlled , giving builders little incentive to build more . Any removal of rent restrictions would be wildly unpopular . Chamberlain introduced a Housing Act in April 1923 that provided subsidies for private companies , and extended rent control until 1925 . He expected rent control to be gradually abolished as the housing supply increased , but the restrictions remained in force until 1933 , when a new scheme was enacted .

In May 1923 , Bonar Law was diagnosed with advanced terminal throat cancer . He immediately resigned , and King George V sent for the Chancellor of the Exchequer , Stanley Baldwin , to form a government . Baldwin served as his own Chancellor for three months while he sought a successor and then promoted Chamberlain to the position . Chamberlain had little time for any policy changes , as he served only five months in the office and did not present a budget . Though the Unionists had an ample majority in the House of Commons and the current Parliament had four years to run , Baldwin decided that a general election was needed and that the Unionists should fight it on the issue of tariff reform . He hoped to gain both a personal mandate as Prime Minister and a policy mandate for his tariff proposals . He miscalculated badly : in the general election held in December 1923 the Unionists remained the largest party in the House of Commons , but were outnumbered by the combined Liberal and Labour MPs . The Baldwin Government retained office until it was defeated when Parliament assembled in January 1924 , and Ramsay MacDonald became the first Labour Prime Minister . Chamberlain 's majority in Birmingham Ladywood was cut yet again , this time to 1 @,@ 500 votes .

With the Unionists in opposition , Chamberlain managed to broker a reconciliation between his brother ( and the other Coalitionists ) and the new leadership , and Austen Chamberlain resumed his place on the front benches . The Labour government fell within months , necessitating another general election . Neville Chamberlain was challenged by Labour candidate Oswald Mosley , who later led the British Union of Fascists . Mosley campaigned aggressively in Ladywood ; and accused Chamberlain of being a " landlords ' hireling " . The outraged Chamberlain demanded that Mosley

retract the claim " as a gentleman " . Mosley , whom Baldwin described as " a cad and a wrong ' un " , refused to retract the allegation . It took several recounts before Chamberlain was declared the winner by 77 votes and Mosley blamed poor weather for the result . Chamberlain had not wanted to desert Ladywood , but now deemed the seat impossible to hold and was adopted for Birmingham Edgbaston for the next election ( held in 1929 ) , at which Ladywood fell to Labour by eleven votes . The Unionists won the 1924 election , their last under that name . Baldwin formed a new government , in which Austen was Foreign Secretary and Neville Chamberlain declined to serve again as Chancellor , preferring his former position as Minister of Health .

= = = Minister of Health = = =

Within two weeks of his appointment as Minister of Health , Chamberlain presented the Cabinet with an agenda containing 25 pieces of legislation he hoped to see enacted . Before he left office in 1929 , 21 of the 25 had passed into law . An early , very popular piece of legislation was the Widows , Orphans , and Old Age Pensions Act 1925 , passed after the Chancellor of the Exchequer , Winston Churchill , had agreed to find whatever money was needed to fund the Act . Churchill , recently returned to the Conservative ranks after fifteen years as a Liberal , expressed envy at Chamberlain 's receiving the credit for the Act , and the Minister of Health described his colleague as " a man of tremendous drive & vivid imagination but obsessed with the glory of doing something spectacular which should erect monuments to him " . The Act lowered the age for receiving the government old age pension from 70 to 65 , as well as providing for dependents of deceased workers . Though the pension sum , ten shillings ( today about £ 20 ) per week , was not enough for a pensioner to make ends meet , Chamberlain stated that it was not intended to replace private thrift and that the sum was the maximum financially feasible .

Chamberlain sought the abolition of the elected Poor Law Boards of Guardians , which administered relief and which in some areas were responsible for rates . Many of the Boards were controlled by Labour , and had defied the Government by distributing relief funds to the able @-@ bodied unemployed . Chamberlain 's first step in the direction of abolition was the Rating and Valuation Act 1925 , which greatly reduced the number of authorities which administered rates , as well as imposing uniform standards for assessment . Despite policy differences Chamberlain continued to work with Churchill , who showed him the manuscript of a volume of his heavily autobiographical The World Crisis . Churchill confided that he would have wished for two more years to revise the manuscript ; Chamberlain wrote to his sisters that he could have done the job in two hours ? with a pair of scissors .

Though Chamberlain struck a conciliatory note during the 1926 General Strike , in general he had poor relations with the Labour opposition . Future Labour Prime Minister Clement Attlee complained that Chamberlain " always treated us like dirt " , and Chamberlain wrote in April 1927 , " More and more do I feel an utter contempt for their lamentable stupidity . " One Labour MP referred to Chamberlain as " a miniature Mussolini " , and others claimed that Chamberlain 's policies had allowed entire communities to starve , dubbing him the " Minister of Death " . His poor relations with the Labour Party eventually played a major part in his downfall as Prime Minister .

With many mining communities suffering high levels of unemployment following the General Strike , some Poor Law boards granted relief to unemployed workers by misusing provisions intended for exceptional circumstances . These boards used the provisions to give benefits to nearly all applicants . With the system thrown into crisis , Chamberlain sought legislation to permit the Minister of Health to dismiss recalcitrant boards , and later got Parliament to pass further legislation to prescribe criminal penalties to members of such boards . Though no board members were prosecuted , Chamberlain dismissed three boards , replacing their members with his own appointees . Finally , in 1929 , Chamberlain brought in legislation to abolish the Poor Law boards entirely , replacing them with bodies appointed by local authorities . Chamberlain spoke in the Commons for two and a half hours on the second reading of the Bill , and when he concluded , he was applauded by all parties . The Local Government Act 1929 passed by an ample majority , and the Morning Post commented that ( despite Labour attacks ) , it had been found to be impossible to

make it unpopular .

= = = Return to opposition = = =

Baldwin called a general election for 30 May 1929 . Chamberlain expected the Conservatives to easily triumph , and thought he would be moved either to the Exchequer or be asked to serve at the Colonial Office , where Joseph Chamberlain had made his mark . Chamberlain easily won in Edgbaston , which he represented for the rest of his life , but the general election resulted in a hung parliament , with Labour holding the most seats . Baldwin and his Government resigned , and Labour leader Ramsay MacDonald took office .

Chamberlain anticipated that Labour would legislate for two years , then seek a general election and be returned with a majority of the seats . Were this to occur , he would be 67 when that term expired , and according to him perhaps too old to hold office . With no ministerial responsibilities , he departed on a three @-@ month tour of East Africa , hoping it might be useful were he to serve in future as Colonial Secretary . As the minority Labour Government attempted to grapple with the onset of the Depression , the Conservative Party indulged in a period of internecine warfare , with Baldwin under attack in the Parliamentary Party and in the press for losing the election , and for being too moderate . Chamberlain attempted to mediate between the press lords and Baldwin , only to learn that the newspaper owners had been trying to influence local constituency organisations behind his back . During the leadership crisis , Chamberlain persuaded Conservative Party chairman John Davidson to resign to relieve the pressure on Baldwin . Chamberlain took the vacant chair himself .

The campaign by the press lords , notably Lord Beaverbrook and Lord Rothermere for " Empire Free Trade " , the removal of tariffs within the Empire , culminated in a crucial by @-@ election at which the press lords ran their own candidate under the banner of the United Empire Party . Robert Topping , the General Director at Conservative Central Office , produced a memorandum showing that Baldwin 's support had eroded tremendously . Chamberlain confronted Baldwin with the memorandum . Baldwin was badly shaken , and told Chamberlain he would resign . After a day , Baldwin reconsidered , and even considered giving up his seat and standing in the by @-@ election himself . When Chamberlain told Baldwin that if he stood and lost , his successor would be badly damaged , Baldwin replied , " I don 't give a damn about my successor , Neville . " Chamberlain resigned as party chairman , though he continued as head of the Conservative Research Department , which he had founded , until his death . Baldwin did not stand in the by @-@ election , but he retained his position and attacked the press barons as wanting " power without responsibility , the prerogative of the harlot through the ages " , and the Conservatives won the election . Baldwin and Chamberlain healed their breach , and Chamberlain helped negotiate the return of the press lords to the Conservative fold . Baldwin led the Conservative Party for another six years . In January 1931 , Churchill , one of Chamberlain 's leadership rivals , left the Conservative front bench in a dispute over policy on India .

In 1931 , the MacDonald Government faced a serious crisis , as the May Report revealed that the budget was unbalanced , with an expected shortfall of £ 120 million . As this information became public , there was a run on the pound , depleting the nation 's gold reserves . The Labour Party refused to consider the massive cuts in unemployment compensation which would be needed to balance the budget , and Prime Minister MacDonald sought support from outside his party . With Baldwin on holiday in France , Chamberlain negotiated for the Conservatives . Chamberlain told MacDonald that the Conservatives would only join a coalition if the full recommended cuts in unemployment compensation were made . Finally , on 24 August 1931 , the Labour Government resigned and MacDonald formed a National Government , supported by most Conservative and Liberal MPs and a minority of the Labour Party . Chamberlain once more returned to the Ministry of Health . The National Government was intended as only a temporary expedient , but governed Britain until Chamberlain 's fall in 1940 . In the ensuing General Election , the National Government won 554 of the 615 seats in the House of Commons , with 473 of its supporters Conservative MPs .



= = = Chancellor and Conservative heir apparent = = =

After the election , MacDonald wanted to designate Liberal National Walter Runciman , an advocate of free trade , as Chancellor . Conservatives insisted that a member of their party who favoured tariffs be given the office . Reluctantly , MacDonald designated Chamberlain as Chancellor , and Runciman was made President of the Board of Trade . Chamberlain proposed a 10 % tariff on foreign goods , with lower or no tariffs on goods from the colonies and the Dominions . Joseph Chamberlain had advocated a similar policy , " Imperial Preference " ; his sons found it pleasing and appropriate that Chamberlain could now promote his father 's policies , and Sir Austen Chamberlain wrote to his brother in November 1931 , " Father 's great work will be completed in his children . "

The tariff issue bitterly divided the Cabinet , and threatened to end the National Government . The Cabinet accepted a proposal by Lord Hailsham , Secretary of State for War , that they agree publicly to disagree , a rare suspension of the doctrine of Cabinet collective responsibility . Chamberlain prepared his tariff bill , which exempted the Dominions pending the Ottawa Conference , set for later that year . On 4 February 1932 , he laid it before the Commons . Addressing a packed House , with the Prince of Wales , the Duke of York and Joseph Chamberlain 's third wife in the gallery , and with his brother seated behind him , Chamberlain concluded by referring to his father 's inability to get a similar proposal adopted ,

I think he would have found consolation for the bitterness of his disappointments , if he could have seen that these proposals , which are the direct and legitimate descendants of his own conception , would be laid before the House of Commons , which he loved , in the presence of one and by the lips of another of the two immediate successors to his name and blood .

At the end of the speech , Sir Austen Chamberlain walked down and shook his brother 's hand . The Import Duties Act 1932 passed Parliament easily . The Ottawa Conference that August produced little result , with Chamberlain bringing home several minor bilateral trade agreements , and no general agreement .

In the interim between the Import Duties Act and the Ottawa Conference , Chamberlain presented his first budget , in April 1932 . The gold standard had been abandoned in the early days of the National Government ; the Bank of England sought its restoration . Chamberlain , on advice from his officials , declined to restore the gold standard , realising that a devalued pound would improve the balance of trade . Otherwise , Chamberlain maintained the severe budget cuts that had been agreed to at the inception of the National Government : Chamberlain cut means @-@ tested benefits and public sector wages , which proved to be an unpopular move . He also cut interest rates , which led to a house @-@ building boom in the south of England and supported plans to clear slums . Interest on the war debt had been a major cost in each budget . Chamberlain was able to reduce the interest rate on most of Britain 's war debt from 5 % to 3 @. @ 5 % . Between 1932 and 1938 , Chamberlain halved the percentage of the budget devoted to payment of interest on the war debt .

Chamberlain hoped that a cancellation of the war debt owed to the United States could be negotiated . In June 1933 , Britain hosted the World Monetary and Economic Conference . Describing the event as the " most crucial gathering since Versailles " , Time magazine featured Chamberlain on its cover , referring to him as " that mighty mover behind British Cabinet scenes , lean , taciturn , iron @-@ willed ... It is no secret that Scot MacDonald remains Prime Minister by Prime Mover Chamberlain 's leave . " The Conference came to nothing , when US President Franklin Roosevelt sent word that he would not consider any war debt cancellation . After the US Congress passed the Johnson Act , forbidding loans to nations in default on their debts , Chamberlain felt that Britain could not pay the entire debt , and , as the Act made no distinction between a partial and complete default , the Chancellor entirely suspended Britain 's war debt payments to the US .

In 1934 , Chamberlain was able to declare a budget surplus , and restore many of the cuts in unemployment compensation and civil servant 's salaries he had made after taking office . He told the Commons , " We have now finished the story of Bleak House and are sitting down this afternoon to enjoy the first chapter of Great Expectations . " With MacDonald in decline and Conservative Party leader Baldwin exhibiting his customary lethargy , Chamberlain increasingly became the

workhorse of the National Government .

Defence spending had been heavily cut in Chamberlain 's early budgets . By 1935 , faced with a resurgent Germany under Hitler 's leadership , he was convinced of the need for rearmament , and was the driving force behind Defence White Papers advocating rearmament in 1936 and 1937 . Chamberlain especially urged the strengthening of the Royal Air Force , realising that Britain 's traditional bulwark , the English Channel was no defence against air power . Rearmament was an unpopular policy in Britain , and Labour attacked Chamberlain as a warmonger . Labour leader and Leader of the Opposition Clement Attlee spoke against the 1936 Budget as tremendously overspending on defence : " Everything was devoted to piling up the instruments of death . " Churchill also criticised the National Government 's defence plans , though he called for an even faster buildup . Despite the sniping from both sides , Chamberlain was very concerned about the expense of rearmament , " What a frightful bill we do owe to Master Hitler , damn him ! If it only wasn 't for Germany , we should be having such a wonderful time just now . "

In 1935 , MacDonald stood down as Prime Minister , taking Baldwin 's post as Lord President of the Council , and Baldwin became Prime Minister for the third time . Chamberlain remained at the Treasury , almost the only Cabinet member not to be moved in the subsequent reshuffle . Chamberlain was still spoken of as heir apparent , but feared being eclipsed by a younger man . To be seen more as the second man of the Government , he insisted on moving into Number 11 Downing Street , the Chancellor 's traditional residence , which had been occupied by Baldwin during MacDonald 's premiership . Baldwin indicated his desire to remain in office until his 70th birthday in August 1937 , but Chamberlain doubted he would last that long . In the 1935 General Election , the Conservative @-@ dominated National Government lost 90 seats from the massive majority of 1931 , but still retained an overwhelming majority of 255 in the House of Commons . During the campaign , deputy Labour leader Arthur Greenwood attacked Chamberlain for spending money on rearmament , stating that the rearmament policy was " the merest scaremongering , disgraceful in a statesman of Mr. Chamberlain 's responsible position , to suggest that more millions of money needed to be spent on armaments " .

In January 1936 , Edward VIII became king on the death of his father , George V. Chamberlain supported Baldwin 's stance that King Edward must abdicate if he wished to marry the woman he loved , Wallis Warfield Simpson . After the conclusion of the Abdication Crisis , Baldwin announced that he would remain until shortly after the Coronation of King Edward 's successor George VI . King George was crowned on 12 May 1937 ; Baldwin resigned on 28 May , advising the King to send for Chamberlain . Sir Austen did not live to see his brother 's final " climb ... to the top of the greasy pole " , having died two months earlier .

= = Appraisal = =

Polemics such as Guilty Men , which helped demolish Chamberlain 's reputation for his foreign policy as premier , also touched on his record as minister . These books blamed the National Government , in which Chamberlain had taken a leading role , for a failure to rearm . Historian David Dutton suggested in his book on Chamberlain that the damage to his reputation , both as Prime Minister and as a Cabinet minister , could have been contained had the Conservative Party defended his policies , but for 23 years after Chamberlain 's death , the party leaders ( Churchill , Anthony Eden , and Harold Macmillan ) had made reputations as opponents of appeasement , and who were little minded to defend Chamberlain 's record as a minister . The Labour landslide in the 1945 General Election cemented this inclination , with Macmillan stating that it was not " Churchill who had brought the Conservative party so low . On the contrary it was the recent history of the Party , with its pre @-@ war record of unemployment and its failure to preserve peace . "

The adoption of policies using Keynesian economics led to other criticisms of Chamberlain 's ministerial record . Popular wisdom then held that governments could keep unemployment at a low level through spending . Chamberlain 's acceptance of unemployment as an inevitable part of the business cycle was seen as outdated . In 1958 , as Prime Minister , Macmillan described a report advocating limits on public investment as " a very bad paper . Indeed a disgraceful paper . It might

have been written by Mr. Neville Chamberlain 's Government . "

In 1961 , a controversial biography of Chamberlain by Conservative Party chairman Iain Macleod defended Chamberlain 's ministerial record . Macleod pointed out that Chamberlain had been a " most valiant " champion of rearmament as Chancellor as early as 1934 , but that little was done . According to Time magazine , Macleod saw Chamberlain as a " humanitarian industrialist , [ a ] progressive Lord Mayor of Birmingham and a dedicated Minister of Health who was damned as a ' Tory socialist ' [ . ] Chamberlain had worked tirelessly in the ' 20s and ' 30s for the ' noble and fascinating ideal ' of fashioning a better life for Britain 's workingman . "

The 1960s and 1970s saw a further reassessment of Chamberlain as a Cabinet minister . Historians such as A. J. P. Taylor pointed out that while the 1930s were a decade of misery for some , for most Britons , it was a time of rising living @-@ standards , with unemployment concentrated in only a few regions of the country . As economists and historians came to question the assumption that the National Government could have spent its way out of unemployment , Chamberlain 's tenure as Chancellor was to an extent rehabilitated . American social historian Bentley Gilbert stated that Chamberlain was " the most successful social reformer in the seventeen years between 1922 and 1939 ... after 1922 no one else is really of any significance . " According to Taylor , writing in 1965 , Chamberlain did more to improve local government while serving as Health Minister than did anyone else in the 20th century .

In the 1980s Margaret Thatcher instituted economic policies reminiscent of Chamberlain 's as Chancellor ? control of inflation ( even at the expense of unemployment ) , minimisation of budget deficits , and low rates of direct taxation . This was a point not lost on the Labour Party , and the Trades Union Congress adopted a slogan of " Forwards to the Eighties not Backwards to the Thirties " . Thatcher 's critics denigrated both her policies and those of the 1930s in such comparisons , but she did not care to defend those of the 1930s . Thatcher stated that the historical justifications for her economic positions were the policies of the Victorian era .

Dutton , who traced the progress of Chamberlain 's reputation through the years , wrote in 2001 that Chamberlain 's accomplishments at the Ministry of Health were " considerable achievements by any standards " and stated that they should not be seen in isolation , but as part of " the authentic Chamberlain , a man who was throughout his life on the progressive left of the Conservative party , a committed believer in social progress and in the power of government at both the national and local level , to do good . " Five years later , Chamberlain biographer Graham Macklin quoted Dutton in noting the eclipse of Chamberlain 's earlier accomplishments by his later policy of appeasement :

As [ Chamberlain 's ] entry in the Oxford Dictionary of National Biography observed , " Had Chamberlain retired in 1937 , he would not have risked anything . He would have been a considerable figure in British political history , his career a study in success . " But Chamberlain did not retire . He accepted the premiership imagining it to be his crowning glory . As it transpired it was his most bitter personal and political defeat . Thus was the " authentic Chamberlain " ? the sincere social reformer ? almost entirely obliterated from the popular consciousness by subsequent history and historiography .

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