

Lecture 2

World War Two & British Politics

Dr Richard Grayson, Head of Politics

Questions

- Did the war contribute to or create a new consensus?
- Impact on Labour victory in 1945?
 - Was electorate more sympathetic to Labour?
 - Did war make Labour more attractive to electorate?

Theories on the Impact of Wars

- Catalyst for change
 - Planned through new policy
 - Unplanned through effects, e.g. military participation, destruction through bombing
- Minimal impact
 - Long-term change despite war
 - War hinders change

Impact of Previous Wars

- Boer or South African War, 1899-1902
 - National Efficiency
 - Links to Tariff Reform
- First World War, 1914-18
 - Society changed
 - Parties changed

Debates on Change in WWII

- Paul Addison – convergence of opinion at elite levels, and social change.
- Corelli Barnett – elite convergence around social reform
- Arthur Marwick – growing radicalism.
- Angus Calder – no change. War mutes Parliament, people themselves make demands.
- Daniel Fox – continuity from pre-war health.
- Deborah Thom – continuity from pre-war education

Coalition Government

- Neville Chamberlain until May 1940



- Winston Churchill then leads coalition 🇬🇧



- Clement Attlee, Deputy PM



Coalition Government

All behind you Winston, 14 May 1940 (David Low)



Popular Experience of War

- Censorship
- Film
- Leaflets and meetings
- Research
- Internment
- Conscription
- Blackout
- Gas masks
- Rationing



Popular Experience of War

Discussion of post-war situation

- Army Education Corps
- J.B. Priestley's broadcasts
- War fought for democracy and 'the people'

Social change

- Women 5% of transport staff in 1939
20% in 1943
- 17% of local government in 1939
46% in 1943.



Civil Service

- Civil servants with Liberal or Labour views recruited, e.g. from universities.
- John Maynard Keynes
- Harold Wilson
- William Beveridge



Origins of Beveridge Report

War Aims Committee, August 1940:

'To consider means of perpetuating the national unity achieved in this country during the war through a social and economic structure designed to secure equality of opportunity and service among all classes of the community.'

Beveridge Report, 1942

- Five giants: want, disease, ignorance, squalor, idleness
- Benefits system financed by workers, employers and state, with public assistance safety net.
- Underpinned by:
 - NHS for all
 - Tax-financed family benefits
 - State action on unemployment

Impact of Beveridge Report

- 73 to 92% support (varied by social groups)
- Criticism from many Conservatives
- Reconstruction Problems Committee, Jan 1943
- Plan but not implement
- Labour calls for 'Beveridge Now'

The Parties and the War

Daily Mirror,
June 1945



The Parties and the War

Labour

- Credibility of involvement in government
- Carries on internal debates

Conservatives

- Tarnished by 1939.
- Weakness of organisation.
- But – 1944 Education Act.

Conclusion

1945 election poster



Conclusion

1945 General Election (July)

	<i>Seats</i>	<i>Votes</i>	<i>%</i>
Conservative	213	9,988,306	39.8
Labour	393	11,995,152	47.8
Liberal	12	2,248,226	9.0
Others	22	854,294	2.8

Turnout: 72.7%

Summary

- Did the war contribute to or create a new consensus?
 - Among the general population - yes?
 - Between the parties – divisions within and between parties.
- Impact on Labour victory in 1945?
 - Public determination not to repeat 'mistakes' of post-1918
