Timeline of British History (1951–1979)

1951 — Winston Churchill *(above left)* regains power for the Conservatives (aged 77) after six years out of office, despite winning fewer votes than the Labour Party.

1955 — Anthony Eden *(right)* succeeds Churchill as Conservative prime minister. Hugh Gaitskell becomes Labour leader on Clement Attlee's retirement.

1956 — Eden faces humiliation at Suez as Britain withdraws from the invasion of Egypt under pressure from the USA and the Soviet Union. Evidence of Britain's post-war decline.

1957 — Harold Macmillan *(right)* succeeds Eden. His famous phrase *'You've never had it so good'* reflects the growing prosperity of the 1950s.

**The European Economic Community (EEC) is formed without Britain joining.*

1958 — Race riots in Notting Hill, London.

1962 — Macmillan's *'Night of the Long Knives'* leads to the sacking of six members of the cabinet after a decline in Conservative popularity.

1963 — Macmillan is replaced as prime minister by Sir Alec Douglas-Home. Labour's Hugh Gaitskell dies and is succeeded as leader by Harold Wilson *(right)*.

1964 — Wilson leads Labour back to power after 13 years, winning the first of his four general elections.

1965 — Edward Heath becomes Tory leader in place of Douglas-Home. Colonial problems develop with Rhodesian independence.

1966 — Wilson wins an increased majority in Parliament.

1967 — The pound is devalued and Chancellor James Callaghan resigns.

1968 — *'Rivers of Blood'* speech by Enoch Powell reflects increased racial tension in the UK.

Labour government's 'In Place of Strife' White Paper attempts to control trade union powers.

1969 — The right to vote (franchise) in the UK is lowered from the age of 21 to 18 in the Representation of the People Act.

Catholic civil rights protests in Northern Ireland results in the British army being deployed. Provisional IRA emerges as a paramilitary Catholic force in the province.

1970 — Edward Heath *(right)* surprisingly wins election for the Conservatives.

1973 — Prime Minister Heath negotiates Britain's entry to the European Economic Community (EEC). Middle East war leads to global economic crisis.

1974 — General elections in both February and October. Heath and the Tories narrowly lose on both occasions. Labour takes power with wafer-thin majority and fewer votes amidst ongoing industrial unrest.

1975 — Britain formally confirms its EEC membership after a referendum which has a vote of two to one in favour *(67% turnout)*.

**Thatcher succeeds Heath as Conservative leader – signals end of 'Years of Consensus'.*

1976 — Jim Callaghan *(right)* replaces Wilson on his retirement as prime minister. Labour seeks a loan from the IMF to aid the British economy.

1977 — Labour loses overall parliamentary majority. Lib-Lab pact is formed for them to stay in power.

1978–9 — Sustained industrial unrest results in the *'winter of discontent'* and helps Margaret Thatcher win power for the Conservatives.

1979 — Margaret Thatcher *(right)* is elected as Britain's first female prime minister as the Conservatives return to power after five years in opposition. Michael Foot takes over from Callaghan as Labour's new leader.

Introductory History Exercise

Key figures of Britain 1951–1979

Using textbooks and the Internet, can you find out at least six things about **one** or more of the individuals below? Present your findings to the rest of your group.

Harold Macmillan 	
Harold Wilson 	
Edward Heath 	
Margaret Thatcher 	

'The Affluent Society' (1951–1964)

Why were the Conservatives so dominant between 1951 and 1964?

The Conservative Party returned to power in October 1951 after over six years in the political wilderness. They were once again led by **Winston Churchill** *(left)*, the inspirational wartime leader, who was now 77. Somewhat controversially, due to the quirks of the British 'First Past the Post' electoral system, the Conservatives received fewer votes *(13.7 million)* than the Labour Party *(13.9 million)* in the 1951 general election but managed to gain more MPs *(see table below)*. Churchill returned to office with a slim parliamentary majority of 17, following six years of significant reforms by the first ever majority Labour government.

1951 General Election – Seats		% Seats	% Vote
Conservative	321	51.3	48.0 (+4.5)
Labour	295	47.2	48.8 (+2.7)
Liberal	6	0.96	2.5 (–6.6)

The Key Issues Facing Britain in the Decade after World War II

- Decolonisation (in terms of cost and national prestige).
- Review of the nation's world role – no longer a major global power compared to the USA and the Soviet Union (amidst the emergence of the prolonged Cold War).
- Financial commitments towards nuclear weapons and ongoing military commitments (Korean War 1950–1953) led to less money for rebuilding the national infrastructure.
- The new NHS was a considerable cost to the national budget.
- Increasing reliance on American financial support, e.g. Marshall Aid (from 1948 onwards).

Key Issue: *All of the above factors led to post-war austerity and economic hardship. This represented significant challenges for the governments of the 1950s onwards.*

Despite its various achievements in office following the end of World War II, there was a feeling that Clement Attlee's Labour government had somewhat *'run out of steam'* towards the end of its time in office, and Attlee had only narrowly been re-elected with a small **parliamentary majority** of five in February 1950. There were also divisions within Labour over NHS charges (leading to Nye Bevan's resignation from the cabinet), the nationalisation of iron and steel in 1951, and ongoing austerity and rationing.

Parliamentary Majority

When a party is elected to government and has more MPs than all other political parties combined.

The Conservative Party had pragmatically adapted to embrace much of Attlee (*below right*) and Labour's post-war welfare reforms including the establishment of the *National Health Service* (1948), **Keynesian** economic management and large-scale **nationalisation**. Collectively such policies came to be viewed as the **'Attlee legacy'**, which focused on a bigger role for central government in the pursuit of greater social and economic equality. Although there were a few policy modifications, the vast majority of this framework for a 'mixed economy' would remain in place under the Conservatives during the 1950s.

Attlee Legacy – Summary

- The establishment of the National Health Service (NHS) from 1948.
- The nationalisation of key industries.
- Keynesian economic management, with significant state intervention.

Keynesianism

The economic theories of the English economist John Maynard Keynes (1883–1946), who emphasised the importance of government spending beyond its budget during a recession in order to stimulate business investment and economic growth.

Churchill as prime minister (1951–1955)

In contrast to the increasingly divided and exhausted Labour government, while in opposition the Conservatives had reorganised and revitalised their organisation under **Lord Woolton**, with the focus on raising funds and recruiting members and embracing a democratic and modern image. They came to power promising *'more red meat'* and an end to the prolonged post-war rationing and economic restrictions of almost ten years, along with a general message that they would bring progress and economic stability to the country after the horrors and turbulence of war:

> *The Conservatives had radically overhauled their organisation and policies during the Attlee years… They had moved decisively towards the consensus for a Welfare State, a more centrist position than ever before, and they had very effectively played on the grimness and occasional absurdities of the rationing years.* [1]

There were some significant post-war economic problems to deal with in a much-changed nation, exacerbated, some would say, by the high levels of public spending by the Labour Party while in office. The country was financially crippled after World War II and had to rely heavily on American financial support in the form of **Marshall Aid** from 1948 onwards.

Labour had also left behind a bleak **balance of payments** deficit (with more expenditure coming in than going out), and this would prove difficult to immediately address. This was because of the legacy of currency devaluation of the late 1940s, as well as economic commitments towards the **Korean War (1950–1953).** This conflict heralded further significant military commitments for Britain as part of the globalisation of the Cold War, and it saw Britain supporting the USA against the Soviet Union and China.

1 Andrew Marr, *A History of Modern Britain* (2007), p. 121.

For Your Information

The Korean War (1950–1953)

- Following an inconclusive division of the Korean peninsula after World War II, the North invaded the South in June 1950.
- Foreign intervention as the USA (and its allies such as the UK) supported the South and China boldly challenged this assertion of military might.
- Ended in an uneasy truce as the USA threatened to use its superior nuclear status – marking the extension of the Cold War to the Far East.

Post-war living standards

Such military expenditure meant there was limited money for domestic expenditure on ordinary people's everyday lives in areas such as key public services. In practice, this meant that post-war **'austerity'** and hardships lingered on for longer than many British politicians would have liked it to.

Austerity

Post-war austerity meant living standards remained low in order to divert resources for exports, social reconstruction, addressing Britain's debts and paying for essential food and raw materials. It also resulted in high taxation and long working hours for the public. It existed for much of the post-war period up until the early 1950s.

Despite the optimism of the Festival of Britain (1951), an event that sought to lift Britain's post-war struggles, the mood of the country has been summed up by one commentator as follows:

> *Britain in 1952 was not a very happy place… the standard of living of the average family would seem harsh today even to Romanians or the poorest of the East Germans.*[2]

The Conservatives ultimately pledged to improve living standards and end some of the economic hardships endured under Labour, notably the general atmosphere of *'austerity'* that had prevailed since 1945, while further currency devaluation was rejected, and income tax was cut and price controls reduced. Churchill's incoming Government also maintained prescription fees and some other NHS charges in line with their original opposition to state healthcare, while it ended the rationing of key food items such as meat, fruit and sugar during the early 1950s, which aimed to *'set the people free'* as promised in their 1951 manifesto.

2 A N Wilson, *The Daily Mail*, 6th September 2008.

Such pragmatic Conservative internal reforms combined with Labour's internal ideological problems while in office laid the foundations for a sustained period of Conservative political dominance from 1951 onwards. The priority of the Conservatives would be to generate wealth, affluence and prosperity for the people of Britain as part of the **post-war boom**, and whether they succeeded throughout the subsequent decade has been a matter of historical debate. Historians have ultimately disagreed as to whether the post-war economic recovery would have occurred anyway, or if Conservative politicians improved and escalated this economic growth even more by their decisions.

Historical Interpretations

The Keynesian (left-wing in comparison to laissez-faire economics) historic analysis has argued that it was the high levels of spending and investment (1945–1951) that stimulated the British economy and laid the foundations for Britain's post-war economic recovery.

However, the more conservative, capitalist (right-wing) interpretation has claimed that the end of wartime controls and rationing in the early 1950s allowed the free market to flourish and therefore generated increased economic growth as the 1950s progressed.

The Conservatives by no means accepted all of Labour's post-war policies and sought to offer some policy distinctions by tackling the perceived excesses of Labour's extension of Keynesian state control, and were *'positioned for the assault on half-a-decade of active socialist government'*.[3] In this respect, they prioritised some degree of deregulation as opposed to Labour's planned economy, and while some moderate Conservatives could live with nationalisation as a fairly mild form of 'state capitalism', they did *'roll back'* some of Labour's socialism of the 1940s by **denationalising** iron, steel and road haulage.

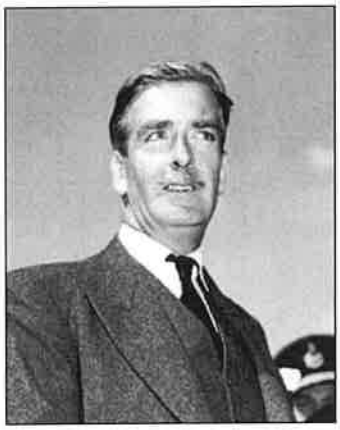
There was, however, some unrest among right-wing Conservatives, supported by Winston Churchill in particular, about the **decolonisation** of the Empire that had begun under Labour with the independence of India in 1947. The key question is whether the political approach of the Conservatives in power after 1951 marked a clear break with the *'Keynesianism'* of Labour between 1945 and 1951. It is also debateable whether it was Conservative economic policies or a general *global post-war economic improvement* that was the key factor in Britain's growing prosperity throughout the 1950s.

Churchill's major problem after 1951 was that he was far from the dynamic politician he once was, and was in fact one of the oldest holders ever of prime ministerial office (being almost 77 in returning to office in late 1951). He therefore arguably lacked the energy and vision to tackle the country's extensive post-war problems. This situation was exacerbated in 1953 when he suffered a stroke, although the details were generally kept from the wider public.

3 Hugo Young, *One of Us* (1989), Ch. 3, p. 31.

Eden as prime minister (1955–1957)

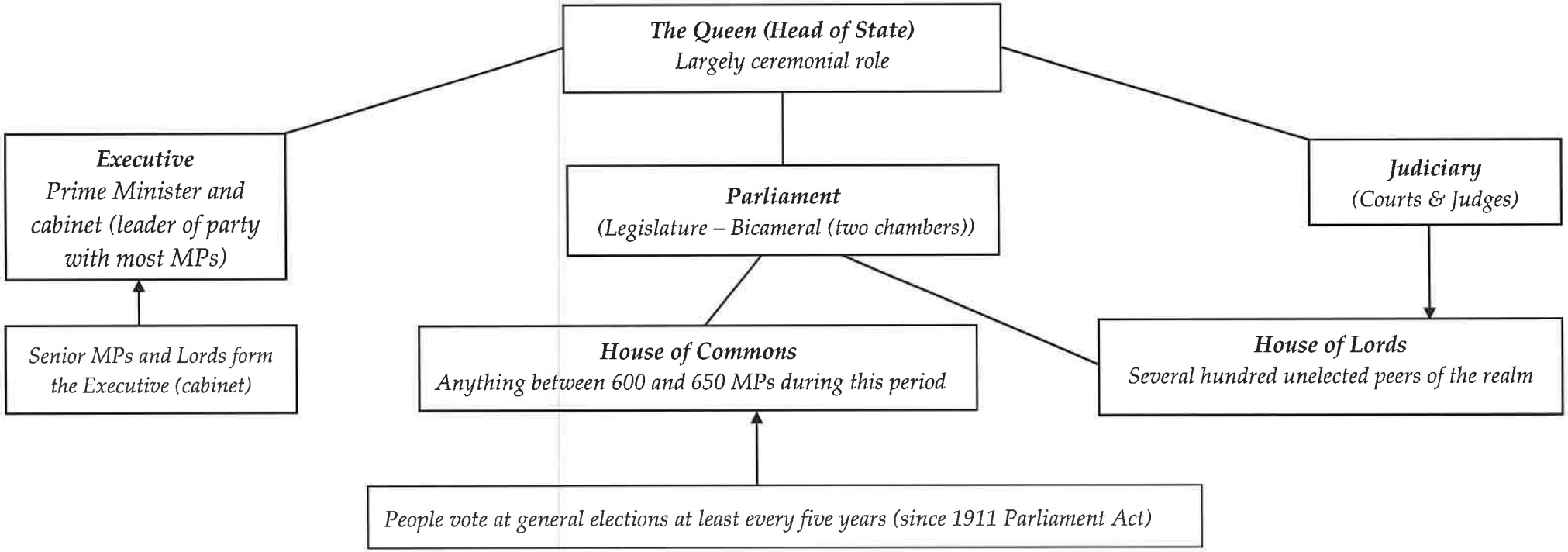
In April 1955 Churchill was succeeded by **Anthony Eden** (*below*), a younger and more energetic figure who had previously impressed as a Foreign Secretary (1951–1955). Eden immediately called an election in order to secure his own personal authority to govern, and the Conservative majority in Parliament was subsequently increased even further (although this was later eclipsed by Macmillan who enjoyed an even greater electoral victory for the Conservatives in 1959, see figures below).



Within the British political system, the size of a party's **parliamentary majority** is a significant factor in their strength and how they can get various policies and laws through parliament (see summary table below).

Party	*MPs*		
	1951	*1955*	*1959*
Con	321	345	365
Lab	295	277	258
Lib	6	6	6
Majority	17	60	101

How the UK's parliamentary system works



Summary of the British Parliamentary System of Government

At the top of the British political system is the monarch, who, for the vast majority of this historical period, has been Queen Elizabeth II (since 1952). While the government body and the courts act in her name, e.g. 'Her Majesty's Government', the role of monarch is generally now considered to be a ceremonial one with limited political power in a democratic age.

Britain operates a parliamentary system, and the party with the most elected MPs therefore controls Parliament (known as a **parliamentary majority**). Like most democratic nations, the UK has three separate branches of government that are supposed to act separately and independently – the executive (cabinet), the legislature (Parliament) and the judiciary. However, as we shall see, such separation is often not achieved.

According to the British Constitution, the real centre of power is, in theory, Parliament, where sovereignty is supposed to reside. However, over the years Parliament has seen its role and functions undermined by the growing executive body. The judiciary is often seen as the weaker and less important branch of government.

The impact of the Suez Crisis on British politics

After waiting many years for Churchill's retirement, **Eden** was keen to take the reins of power and make an impact in his own right. While he was rewarded with a handsome electoral victory in 1955, many commentators claim that, when faced with his first major political task, he completely failed to meet the challenge, and that challenge came at Suez in Egypt.

Egypt was an important strategic location within the British Empire and had been one of Britain's key 'spheres of influence' for many years. However, the recently installed Egyptian leader **Colonel Nasser** *(below)* had come to power promising to remove the spectre of the Empire and the role of Britain from his part of the world. Eden and some other Western politicians were alarmed at Nasser's anti-Western and socialist sentiments and they likened Nasser to Hitler as someone who should not be appeased. Yet the rise of Nasser and his desire and that of his countrymen to be independent could be viewed as being aligned with Britain's desire to withdraw from its imperial commitments (known as **'decolonisation'**), e.g. as had happened in India in the late 1940s. Yet Eden and others in government wanted to withdraw on Britain's terms and at their time of choosing, and not be forced to do so by such colonial uprisings.

This British hostility was put to the test in July 1956 when Nasser announced the nationalisation of the Suez Canal Company, a decision which had major strategic and trading repercussions for much of Europe. The spark for this decision was the USA's decision to withdraw funding from Nasser's proposed *Aswan Dam* project.

Britain, along with **France** and **Israel**, were disturbed by this development and saw it as a threat to their influence in the Mediterranean and the Middle East regions. Britain had concerns about losing control of the Suez's links with the ex-Empire countries in Asia, particularly India. Eden particularly felt that Nasser could not be left unchallenged, and these three countries subsequently organised a secret meeting at Sevres *(France)* in September 1956 to prepare the way for an invasion of Egypt in November 1956.

> *Any failure on the part of the Western Powers to take the necessary steps to regain control over the Canal would have disastrous consequences for the economic life of the Western Powers for their influence in the Middle East.*
>
> **Anthony Eden, Memo to Cabinet, 27th July 1956**

However, when the invasion commenced and appeared to be progressing smoothly, the *'superpower'* nations of the USA and the Soviet Union expressed grave concerns at this foreign policy development beyond their control. Both feared that this was an attempt by Britain to re-assert its imperial role, and despite Cold War tensions, both superpowers were opposed to such a development. By November 1956, the United Nations, under significant superpower pressure, demanded a ceasefire and halt to the invasion.

As a result, British, French and Israeli troops were forced to withdraw before Nasser could be tackled, and the Egyptian leader was triumphant at the abandonment of the invasion. Britain, in particular, faced humiliation as it appeared that it could not conduct a foreign policy without American approval. It had alienated much of the Arab world and its declining international status was clearly visible in this episode:

> *By 1956 and the Suez episode, much of the governing elite had accepted that Britain could no longer act alone.* [4]

[4] Peter Hitchens, *The Abolition of Britain* (1999), Ch. 16, p. 326.

Eden's resignation

The repercussions of the Suez Affair broke Eden and *'his health and nerves gave way… and 'Suez' became four-letter shorthand for the moment when Britain realised her new place in the world'.*[5] Eden eventually resigned in January 1957, unable to deal with the consequences of what was both a personal and national disaster. Amidst allegations of a nervous breakdown, Eden was replaced by **Harold Macmillan** who somewhat surprisingly defeated many people's favourite for the role, Rab Butler. The Suez Crisis was the clearest example of Britain's decline as a major military force within the international pecking order, and it visibly marked the emergence of the USA as the new ascendant superpower.

Task

What were the consequences of the Suez Crisis of 1956 for both Britain and for Anthony Eden?

1.
2.
3.
4.
5.

5 Andrew Marr, *A History of Modern Britain* (2007), pp. 158–159.

Macmillan as prime minister (1957–1964)

Domestic policies: Welfare state and living standards in the 1950s

Harold Macmillan (*right*), who replaced Eden, was a moderate, paternalistic and pragmatic Conservative who had previously held several prominent cabinet positions including Chancellor of the Exchequer (1955–1957), Foreign Secretary (1955) and Defence Secretary (1954-55). Macmillan had developed a clear social awareness following his observations of the hardship and economic depression of the inter-war years. He had also developed a positive image with the wider public by effectively using new technologies such as television in order to get his political message across.

Under Macmillan's leadership between 1957–1963 there was, therefore, further progressive domestic policy initiatives (in relation to social policy as opposed to a primary focus on economic management). This approach in particular fitted in with Macmillan's **'One Nation'** vision of Conservatism, as outlined in his 1938 book *The Middle Way*, and it was consistent with someone greatly influenced and concerned by the mass unemployment of the 1930s.

One Nation Conservatism

A term used to describe the moderate wing of the Conservative Party. The term refers to a nation characterised by social solidarity and harmony between classes, as opposed to a nation polarised into 'two nations' and divided along class lines. Harold Macmillan (Prime Minister 1957–1963), is often viewed as the leading post-war advocate of One Nation Conservatism, following on from the late nineteenth-century Prime Minister Benjamin Disraeli.

This viewpoint rejected the minimal welfare provision and charity of the so-called 'devil's decade' of the 1930s, and instead saw a more positive role for a more generous welfare state. Such an approach certainly built on Labour's significant reforms of the 1940s, and specific policy examples were as follows:

- *As Housing Minister under Churchill between 1951 and 1954, Macmillan established his social reformer credentials as he outdid the previous Labour government's achievements by building 300,000 new houses a year – a pledge the Conservatives had made while in opposition and which exceeded the rate of the previous Labour government. Housing needs continued to be severe, with the problem worsened by the growing population of post-war 'baby boomers'. This Conservative housing policy appeared to be a further indicator of the acceptance of Labour's policy agenda of 1945–1951.*

  As the decade progressed, however, critics were quick to highlight (similar to the 1930s) that a Conservative-led administration appeared to be prioritising private housing over government-owned social housing. This appeared to be consistent with government aims for a 'property-owning democracy', but some of the social housing stock such as high-rise tower blocks would later prove to be of poor quality and have a limited lifespan, and there was also a relaxation of private rent controls in 1957. The suggestion, therefore, was that such housing policies focusing on improving levels of home-ownership were favouring the better-off members of society.

- *The Mental Health Act (1959) was a landmark law recognising the significance of mental illness, which, again, showed a more compassionate and interventionist side to Macmillan's Conservatism.*

- *Approximately 6,000 new schools and 11 new universities were opened between 1951 and 1964 – representing a further expansion of the broader welfare state.*

- *In 1962 the Conservatives launched an ambitious 'ten year hospital plan' for the NHS which eventually resulted in the construction of 90 new hospitals at the total cost of approximately £500 million – a further rebuke to those within the party who wanted to limit spending on this welfare policy area.*

Questions and Talking Points

1. What impact did 'stop-go' economics have on the British economy and wider society?
2. To what extent was post-war recovery and rising affluence down to global factors or Conservative economic management in the 1950s?
3. Explain and assess the key reasons why the Conservatives were electorally popular during the 1950s.

Despite significant and embarrassing setbacks, such as Suez, by the mid-1950s the Conservatives had ultimately lost the negative image that they had been associated with in the 1930s – particularly so on a domestic level where they rebranded themselves as being the advocates of improved living standards and prosperity. On a foreign policy level, they also exploited the developing **'Cold War'** situation by depicting themselves as strong defenders of Britain's international position in comparison to Labour's socialists and their ideological links with the Soviet Union.

At the 1959 general election the Conservatives were returned to office for a third successive time and with an increased parliamentary majority of 101, suggesting growing popularity as the decade progressed. The 1956 Suez crisis and Eden's subsequent resignation in early 1957 was swept under the carpet, as the party quickly unified around a new leader. Despite being a government minister throughout the 1950s, Harold Macmillan was viewed as a fresh face and Labour was still viewed by many voters as divided, with the party's new leader, Hugh Gaitskell, struggling to convince the electorate that he was the man for the top political job.

There was, perhaps, some degree of luck to being in power just as the economic boom began in the early 1950s, but Macmillan headed a united and talented cabinet and the Conservatives' strategy appeared to promote this general message of increased prosperity and competent government with slogans such as: *'Life is better with the Conservatives: don't let Labour ruin it'*. This election victory has been described as:

> *The high tide of consensual post-war Conservatism…a landslide victory… (but) notably free of the language of challenge and contained few specific promises.*[6]

How much political consensus?

After six years of radical government it appeared that the established *'old order'* had resumed control of the country from 1951 onwards. However, there was clearly a broad acceptance of many of Labour's policies since 1945 (notably nationalisation and the extension of the welfare state), so much so that the phrase ***'Butskellism'*** was coined to emphasise the similarity of outlook of the two major parties.

Consensus

A broad or general agreement over an issue (or issues) between different groups within society.

Denationalisation

The reversal of nationalisation – to hand an industry back to the private sector.

6 Hugo Young, *One of Us* (1989), Ch. 4, p. 41.

This term was first used by *The Economist* magazine in 1954, and it derived from elements of the name of prominent Conservative Rab Butler, and the prominent Labour politician (and leader from 1955) Hugh Gaitskell. Both parties essentially agreed on a 'mixed economy', with elements of private and public provision working together. This is significant as it illustrated that there was broad cross-party ***'consensus'*** about how to tackle the nation's post-war problems.

The Conservatives ultimately had no intention of returning to the 'laissez-faire' free market policies of the 1930s and overturning such post-war policies as they were generally popular with the wider public, and public spending on the enlarged welfare state was both maintained and in some areas increased. This approach, therefore, continued Labour's focus on industrial growth and full employment, and there was also agreement on the concept of 'National Service'. This saw some young men (no women after the war) serve a short-term spell in the armed forces, and lasted from Attlee's rule in 1948 until 1963. It is for these reasons that from the mid-1940s onwards the period is known as **'the years of consensus'** between the two major parties, which subsequently lasted approximately thirty years according to most historians.

Despite dominating the political scene throughout the 1950s and broadly embracing the post-war *'welfare consensus'*, such ongoing electoral success would prove to be difficult for the Conservative Party to sustain in the long term, particularly with some challenging social and economic problems around the corner. As already indicated, there were some areas of inter-party political disagreement towards overall economic policy-making and there were also growing signs of social discord and disagreement as the 1950s progressed into the 1960s, with race and class issues coming to the fore alongside a steadily growing crime rate. This would indicate that post-war unity did not sustain itself for long within wider British society, although there was arguably more agreement than disagreement of the major social and political issues of the day.

Questions and Talking Points

1. Explain what the term 'Butskellism' meant in this period of history.
2. Were the Conservatives politically pragmatic or had they genuinely changed their views and attitudes by the 1950s?
3. How much 'consensus' was there across British politics and society throughout the 1950s?

Exercise: Model Essay Task

Write a brief essay plan providing key points in support of each point of view.

To what extent did the Conservative government of 1951–1964 follow a post-war consensus established by the Labour government of 1945–1951?

Evidence of 'consensus'	Evidence of distinct policies

Conservative economic policies in the 1950s

In terms of managing the post-war economy, during the 1950s and early 1960s the Conservatives were increasingly criticised for pursuing what become known as **'stop-go'** economics, when periods of high government spending were then followed by cutbacks and retrenchment (often to coincide with electoral cycles, with spending increases and tax cuts targeted at voters before an election took place).

Generally high levels of public spending suggested the Conservatives were following Labour's economic policies from 1945–1951, but spending cutbacks during some periods along with a lack of long-term investment in some key traditional industries indicated a distinct course of their own.

There were clearly some internal party divisions on economic policy, notably evident in the resignation of the Chancellor of the Exchequer **Peter Thorneycroft** in 1958 (along with two junior ministers), in protest at what they felt was excessive government spending levels on expensive policy areas like the NHS. This was, perhaps, a sign of things to come in terms of the Conservative Party's position regarding levels of public spending that were viewed as being too high by many on the right of the party, and it triggered the start of an internal debate that would be more directly addressed by Margaret Thatcher's leadership almost twenty years later. After 1961 Chancellor Selwyn Lloyd tried, without great success, to impose specific financial restraints (also known as 'efficiency savings') on NHS spending as part of the so-called 'pay pause'.

Conservative Chancellors 1951–1964

- *Rab Butler (1951–1955)*
- *Harold Macmillan (1955–1957)*
- *Peter Thorneycroft (1957–1958)*
- *Derick Heathcoat-Amory (1958–1960)*
- *John Selwyn Lloyd (1960–1962)*
- *Reginald Maudling (1962–1964)*

Government spending levels were, therefore, often timed to coincide with elections and to enhance Conservative prospects, as was the case in 1959 in particular. However, this caused disruption, inconsistent investment and uncertainty within the economy. Churchill's Chancellor, **Rab Butler**, was particularly criticised for this tendency, although other chancellors during this period also come in for such criticism. However, for all of the negative comments about this policy, the overall economic indicators were relatively impressive:

> *Although 'stop-go' policies were attacked for destabilising the economy, they did not destabilise it by much, and unemployment never exceeded 3 per cent over the whole Conservative period.*[7]

7 Robert Skidelsky cited in David Marquand and Anthony Seldon, *The Ideas that Shaped Post-War Britain*, (1996) Ch. 3, p. 51.

Domestic politics: Improved living standards and 'Consumerism'

A direct consequence of a steadily growing economy was improved lifestyles and living conditions for the wider population. During the 1950s, the Governments of **Churchill, Eden** and then **Macmillan** pursued specific policies which they believed would finally help Britain recover from the aftermath of both World War II after 1945, and the Korean War (which ended in 1953). A key economic and social policy focus was, therefore, to move away from the ***'era of austerity'*** of the immediate post-war years, and other key policy aspirations and positive achievements were as follows:

- *A significant private investment boom generated extra prosperity following sustained wartime hardship.*
- *Due to the post-war boom, governments of this period were able to lower levels of income tax, which in turn improved consumer income and spending power.*
- *Post-war controls and restrictions were removed, particularly rationing, while increased use of refrigerators gave people more choice when it came to purchase and storage of food.*
- *Between 1951 and 1963, average wages rose by 72% compared to a 45% increase in prices – this reflected a general increase in people's living standards and spending power.*
- *Growing prosperity was reflected in the growth of car ownership – from under three million to seven million throughout this decade, and by a staggering 500% between 1951 and 1964. This created a significant growth in employment opportunities in the UK car industry in particular.*
- *There was similar rapid surge in television licences, which had grown from nine million in 1959 to over 16 million by the late 1960s. This was a clear reflection of the rapid growth in TV ownership in the UK.*
- *By 1961 the working week had been reduced from 48 to 42 hours, generating further leisure time for working people.*

Positive balance of payments

As a result of such visible evidence of economic growth, Britain was increasingly viewed as an **'affluent society'**, with improving lifestyles, improving post-war trade and government **balance of payments** figures. Alongside falling inflation, this led to the creation of a 'feel-good' factor amongst much of the UK population. This mood of growing general prosperity was subsequently evident in the governing Conservative Party being rewarded with convincing general election victories in 1955 and 1959 (with increased majorities each time), and a party membership of almost three million in the early 1950s. The Conservative election slogan of 1959 seemed to sum up the majority of public opinion: *'Life is better with the Conservatives, don't let Labour ruin it'*. This electoral victory was the first time in the century when a political party had won three consecutive general elections.

There was also a growth in 'suburbia' as many people could afford more expensive homes, although this was not spread equally throughout the country, and elements of a 'north-south divide' lingered on from the 1930s. On a domestic level, the country, therefore, became more 'consumerist' in its outlook, with people buying luxuries rather than essentials as a reflection of the growing level of personal wealth and disposable income. Historians and commentators, such as Andrew Marr, have argued that social change and dislocation, growing prosperity and an expanding middle class were all enhancing the Conservative's political fortunes. Even when they lost power in 1964 they only did so by a very narrow margin, and the Conservative promotion of a *'property-owning democracy'* had greater appeal than rival party policies.

'You've Never Had it so Good'

Harold Macmillan was the longest-serving Conservative prime minister of this 13 year period, and has been described as *'a high-minded Victorian reformer'*.[8] He governed from 1957 to 1963 and despite his somewhat *'stuffy'* aristocratic image, Macmillan utilised the increasingly important medium of television to project a more positive public profile, and was often referred to as 'Supermac' by some supportive parts of the press. Fairly early on in his term as prime minister, on 20th July 1957, Macmillan uttered words in a speech in Bedford that have been immortalised over the years, and to many people sum up the growing mood of prosperity and opportunity in 1950s Britain:

You will see a state of prosperity such as we have never had in my lifetime – nor indeed in the history of this country. Indeed, let us be frank about it – most of our people have never had it so good. Go around the country, go to the industrial towns, go to the farms and you will see a state of prosperity such as we have never had in my lifetime – nor indeed in the history of this country.

Key Questions

1. To what extent is the above quote an accurate analysis of the impact of Conservative economic and social policies during the 1950s?
2. In being described as a 'high-minded Victorian reformer', what does this suggest would be Macmillan's attitude to how Britain was changing in social, class and economic terms between 1951 and 1964?

8 Andrew Marr, *A History of Modern Britain* (2007), p. 162

Rising living standards – the affluent society and consumerism

Increased car ownership from the 1950s

In terms of rising living standards and consumerism in the 1950s, a clear sign of this was growing car ownership. There was certainly some evidence of how this impacted on wider society, and also it certainly improved the leisure opportunities for average families during the 1950s and 1960s in particular. By the 1960s, with cars being mass produced, prices subsequently falling and wage rises bringing them within the price range of more families, sales continued to rocket. The most popular cars were the *Capri*, the *Cortina* and the *Escort*.

How the car impacted on people's leisure and lifestyle options could be seen in the following evidence:

- Increasingly easy access to the countryside from urban areas, and in particular to holiday destinations around the UK. This was specifically the case in relation to previously remote locations in places such as the west of Wales and the more coastal areas of Cornwall.
- This trend led to an increase in road and motorway construction, with new roads required to link together various parts of the country that had previously been somewhat disconnected. Traffic congestion levels in large towns and cities subsequently grew, and the UK's first small strip of motorway track (forming part of the modern M6 near Preston), was opened in 1958. The country's first full motorway, the M1, was in operation by 1959. Jobs were, therefore, created in both road construction and the car industry itself, although it could be said that the natural environment suffered as a result of both trends in terms of 'concreting' over the countryside and increasing pollution.
- By contrast, the growth of car usage had a long-term negative impact on the UK's railways, with steadily declining rail use culminating in the Beeching Report of 1963, which closed down thousands of railway stations and removed thousands of kilometres of track.
- Consequently, there was a significant growth in leisure and tourist provisions across the UK, which sought to exploit this additional car usage that would facilitate a greater flow of customers to such locations, often just for short-term day trips or weekend visits.
- One particular growth area within this holiday environment was the use of the caravan, which by the end of the 1960s contributed to approximately a fifth of all holiday activity in the UK.
- The increased car usage also made it easier for people to move out to the suburbs and new towns and travel for their work (commuting), leisure and shopping needs with greater ease. It also highlighted clear social and wealth divisions between those that could afford cars and those that could not.

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The numbers of UK households with cars grew from an estimated 15% in the early 1950s to approximately 40% (and rising) by the late 1960s. Car ownership in the capital city of London quadrupled between 1950 and 1970.

The growing influence of television from the 1950s onwards

Low levels of taxation and high levels of employment ultimately appeared to benefit Conservative electoral fortunes in the 1950s, and, in terms of everyday life, people generally became more prosperous. The country subsequently became transformed by a reliance on new technology such as cars and household appliances like washing machines and televisions, which were now more affordable to most of the population, either by outright payment or hire purchase (via loans).

Television would become a symbol of this more prosperous and 'consumerist' middle-class lifestyle, and it would go on to develop a massive influence over British society, swiftly eclipsing the radio (by 1958) and the number of cinemas going into significant decline (by the end of the 1960s the number of cinemas had fallen over the decade from 3,414 to 1,558). Between 1956 and 1960, the number of UK households with a television almost doubled from 5.7 million to 11 million.[9]

As a consequence of this trend, specific television shows and broadcasts had significant influence over the wider British population. Popular television events from this era included the Coronation of Queen Elizabeth II in 1953, where an estimated 27 million people were said to have watched the event on TV, and in the next decade England winning the football World Cup in 1966 was another major television landmark.

Popular TV shows that became established in popular affection throughout the 50s and 60s included the quiz show *Take Your Pick* (1955–1968), entertainment shows *Opportunity Knocks* (1956 and 1964–1978) and *Sunday Night at the London Palladium* (1955–69) and drama series such as *Emergency Ward 10* (1957–67) and *Dixon of Dock Green* (1955–1976). In addition to this there was also the first broadcast of a popular 'soap opera' set in Manchester, *Coronation Street*, which first broadcast at the end of 1960 and is still running to the present day. These British TV shows were supplemented by a growing number of American imported programmes such as *Rawhide*, *Bonanza* and *I Love Lucy*,[10] and these programmes developed large audience followings and indicated the power and popularity of certain programmes during this developing television era. Such developments would also confirm the power and influence of television across British society, and this would become increasingly evident during the remaining decades of the twentieth century.

Educational opportunities

Amidst such a period of generally increased affluence and a growing middle class, there was some growing criticism of a divisive education system that appeared to be developing as a consequence of the **1944 Butler Education Act**.

This formed the basis of growing left-wing criticism of the socially divisive nature of the **'tripartite'** national education system, where children from the age of eleven were selected by secondary schools on the basis of ability. They would then attend school up to the age of 15 at either grammar schools, secondary moderns or technical schools (based on their academic ability).

Although this important piece of legislation extended the period that children were at school by a further year (up to 15) and provided them with further knowledge for the workplace, it was already emerging that the more academic and 'selective' grammar schools (choosing students on academic ability by the 11+ exam) were appearing to outperform and be far more popular than the state secondary moderns and technical colleges.

9 Source: http://www.barb.co.uk/resources/tv-facts/tv-ownership

10 Source: House of Lords Communications Committee – First Report, The British Film and Television Industries (January 2010) http://www.publications.parliament.uk/pa/ld200910/ldselect/ldcomuni/37/3707.htm

By the 1950s it was becoming apparent that the more affluent middle classes were dominating grammar schools, and consequently this type of school tended to perform better. Such developments were broadly seen to favour the Conservative Party's overall view of society, fitting in with its outlook on selective education and better educational opportunities for its bedrock middle-class supporters. However, from a more socialist perspective it could be discriminating against the poorer social classes, who received places at selective grammar schools in smaller numbers.

Critics, therefore, argued that it gave the better-off social classes unfair educational advantages and opportunities in life, while supporters of the tripartite system said it rewarded academic ability from all classes and encouraged greater **'social mobility'**.

> ***Social Mobility***
> The idea that people can improve their position and status within society and move from one social group (or class) to another.

Yet the image of a better-educated 'social elite' was reinforced by the fact that the senior levels of government were still dominated by members of the country's most elite private schools such as Eton and Harrow. There were also ongoing concerns that there were insufficient grammar schools in certain parts of the country (to meet the required demand), and that such schools received a disproportionate amount of funding, as well as fears that Britain's technical education system was poor in comparison to various competitor countries; creating a negative socio-economic impact in the long term.

On a more positive level, new qualifications known as O Levels and A Levels were launched in 1951, aimed at improving the standards and range of subjects offered at secondary level education. Grants and scholarships were also extended after 1944 to encourage working-class children to access grammar schools and eventually university. At university level, the **Robbins Report** of 1963 would later call for a dramatic expansion in university provision across the UK, with only 4% of school leavers attending university in the early 1960s. Higher education student numbers would steadily rise under governments of different parties during this decade, although such numbers would again disproportionately favour the middle classes.

There were, however, significant efforts to increase the number of women university students from the early 1960s onwards, as up until 1945 only about a quarter of university graduates were female and some top universities like Cambridge did not grant degrees to women until 1948. There were also attempts to expand 'redbrick' universities (mainly based in large towns and cities) and widen access to them. Such educational reforms generally sought to give the Conservatives a more 'modernised' image in this important area of social policy.

Changing social attitudes and tensions

The issue of class divisions within education was a factor in the broader growth of social and class tensions of the period, and such issues would also be faced by future governments in the years ahead. Overall, despite a growing middle class, not everyone benefited from this so-called 'age of prosperity' and class divisions remained quite pronounced in the 1950s and the wartime levels of class unity appeared to have faded away. A male-dominated and largely upper-class and aristocratic political **'establishment'** remained the dominant political force in Britain as the 1950s commenced, with the ability to move upwards within society limited. The idea that Britain would have a woman prime minister to emerge from the middle classes by 1979 would not have been predicted by many people at this point in time!

This 'class-based' society was reflected in fairly stable voting patterns for the two major parties, with Labour picking up most of the working-class vote and the Conservatives dominating the middle-class section of the electorate. However, despite such class divisions in the 1950s, none of the mainstream parties actively encouraged such class conflict, and by this stage a sizeable middle-class minority supported Labour and approximately a third of the working classes voted Conservative (often due to patriotic and deferential factors).

The Labour leadership, in particular, was dominated by the middle classes (many of whom were intellectuals) and did not want to overthrow the class system in revolutionary manner. It was not considered to be possible that ordinary working-class people could progress up the class system, and it would not be until the 1980s, in particular, that the theme of **'social mobility'** and movement between classes would be revisited and promoted. The 1958 **Life Peerages Act** was perhaps a reflection of attempts by the government to lessen the class-based divisions within society, allowing appointed peers for the first time to sit in the House of Lords alongside hereditary lords. Such a move was an attempt to make the lords more reflective of wider society and a less blatantly 'upper class' political institution.

Opportunities for women

Beneath the surface of an otherwise resilient and familiar post-war society there was a gradual change in the role of women, many of whom had taken on very active roles during World War II and didn't want to return to purely domestic positions when the conflict was over.

Consequently, from the 1950s onwards more and more women would enter the world of employment and the idea of a 'working woman' would become much more accepted in British society. As a result, about 50% of all women of working age had some kind of job during the 1950s (and the number would continue to grow in later years). However, many women retained their purely domestic roles as housewives, and the typical jobs held by women were unskilled and lower paid than men, which would become an issue to be addressed in the years ahead.

Teenage and youth culture

The 1950s are often viewed as something of a 'golden age' in being perceived by many as the last known 'stable' period where people could leave their doors unlocked within a friendly and safe local community. However, there were trends beginning to emerge that suggested that such an idyllic environment was perhaps a thing of the past.

A significant social development of the 1950s and early 1960s was the emergence of a new teenage and youth culture, often shaped by American influences and icons such as film star James Dean (*right*) in the 1950s, and singer Bob Dylan in the 1960s. Many such teenagers had additional spending power due to the increased affluence of society, and this created a new retail and consumer market specifically aimed at their tastes and fashions. While most teenagers expressed their newly discovered cultural identities in a positive and liberating manner (as evident in less conventional clothing, fashion and musical tastes), this revival of a reassertive youth culture had the negative effect of leading to a rise in general crime and gang-related violence and disorder.

Episodes such as the Notting Hill riots of 1958, along with racial and social tensions in other towns and cities indicated the growing prevalence of 'gang' related hooliganism and youth/teenage violence. This lack of respect for traditions and conventional social values became more evident among some younger members of society as the 1950s progressed, with the **'Teddy Boy'** image often associated with such activities. A growth in crime and violence could well have reflected the developing social unrest of the late 1950s and the social dislocation experienced by many people who had struggled to adjust in the post-war years, when economic recovery did not happen as quickly as it needed to for many of those at the lower end of the social scale, in particular.

Teddy Boy

A 1950s British sub-culture featuring gangs of young men, whose dress code was inspired by a mixture of American rock'n'roll culture and Edwardian fashions.

Attitudes to immigration

Apart from very small but well-established Jewish, Chinese and Indian communities (mainly in large cities such as London) there was a very limited non-white population in Britain during the period 1918 to 1939, and with non-white immigration into the country relatively low, racial tensions were, therefore, limited on a national level. However, the government feared the social impact of a notable influx of non-white citizens, and there were some limited race riots in 1919 following some small-scale immigration into some parts of the country (namely London and other large ports) from various parts of the Empire after the war. This largely involved people who had served in it in some capacity. There were also some later occasional outbursts of racial tension, and there was some specifically 'anti-Semitic '(anti-Jewish) activities from various fascist groups during the 1930s who sought to mimic Hitler's approach in Germany.

However, post-war immigration into the UK was encouraged by successive governments due to the heavy demands of post-war reconstruction and an overall shortage of British workers. On another level, growing racial tensions were a further worrying aspect of how British society appeared to be developing. Many immigrants were, therefore, required to fill the gaps in the post-war labour market and legislation was passed to make immigration into the UK easier – the **British Nationality Act of 1948** gave approximately 800 million citizens of Britain's former Empire effective British citizenship. As a result immigration into the country rose from **3,000 per year in 1953** to **46,800 in 1956** and **136,400 in 1961**. The influx of immigrants since the end of World War II also led to growing ethnic communities in many large towns and cities across the UK, with most of the immigrants arriving from the former Empire (or New Commonwealth), from locations such as the Caribbean, the Indian sub-continent and parts of Africa.

This in turn led to racial tensions between the new arrivals and existing communities, and as a result of such immigration, many inner-city areas of large towns and cities began to experience significant demographic change as large numbers of non-white immigrants became more prominent and visible in such locations. Many of the new arrivals took over the poorer housing and the lower-paid jobs, but this caused resentment among some of the white population. Such simmering racial tensions came to a head in the late summer of 1958, when there were significant race riots in Notting Hill, London, when white gangs of youths attacked the homes of some of the local black population. As a social commentary of the time, in some inner cities, various pubs and hotels displayed the racially offensive (but at the time perfectly legal) signs which stated: *'No Blacks, No Irish, No Dogs'.*

The issue of race relations and **multiculturalism** would continue to cause problems for successive governments in the 1950s and 1960s in particular, and one historian has commented on the significance of the 1958 Notting Hill unrest as follows:

> *Rather like Suez a couple of years earlier, Notting Hill was more a symbol of change than a bloody slaughter... Nobody was killed in the rampaging and by the standards of later riots, there was little physical damage.*[11]

Multiculturalism
A type of society where different cultures exist alongside each other.

Such comments appear to suggest that this tense aspect of race relations was yet a further reflection of the changing times, uncertainty and dislocation affecting much of the ordinary British population, particularly those experiencing much of this demographic change first-hand in the urban, inner-city areas. On this basis, Britain in the 1950s and early 1960s, therefore, appeared to be a country that was going through some difficult social, economic and political changes, and by 1964 there was an estimated one million non-white immigrants living in the UK (with the figure rising), a number fuelled by the children they would have born in the UK ('second-generation immigrants').

Winds of change and decolonisation

On an international level, in February 1960, Prime Minister Harold Macmillan *(right)* appeared to formally recognise a new role for Britain within its former Empire while making a speech in Cape Town, South Africa. Macmillan acknowledged the determined march of **decolonisation** and nationalism within the former Empire, particularly within the African continent from where he spoke:

> *The wind of change is blowing through this continent. Whether we like it or not, this growth of national consciousness is a political fact.*

The consequences of this speech were wide-ranging, both on the international and domestic scenes. Macmillan appeared to generally accept that the vast British Empire was in retreat across the globe (not only in Africa), and that Britain's role was in decline within its traditional 'spheres of influence'. He went on to express his anxiety with the apartheid regime in South Africa which increasingly discriminated against the majority black population. The following year (1961) there took place a whites-only referendum which approved the establishment of the nation as a republic, subsequently cutting formal ties between South Africa and Britain, with the country leaving the Commonwealth and removing the Queen as the head of state.

Decolonisation
The process of former colonies within an empire being granted full independence.

On a domestic level, the apparent acceptance and approval of decolonisation from a Conservative prime minister (at one time the party of the Empire) caused significant rumblings among the party's MPs. The **'Monday Club'**, a faction of the parliamentary party that focused on empire and patriotism, emerged as a notable backbench pressure group in response to such developments, an indication that many Conservatives would find the policy of a disintegrating empire difficult to accept. It also sparked fears of a further large-scale influx of immigration into the UK from these former imperial colonies, which would create further economic and social tension within various parts of the country.

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11 Andrew Marr, *A History of Modern Britain* (2007), p. 198.

In the years that followed from the early 1960s onwards, various parts of Africa broke away from British control and influence, continuing a decolonising process within this continent that the Suez crisis had arguably sparked off in the mid-1950s. Between 1960 and 1965 countries such as Nigeria, Sierra Leone, Uganda, Kenya, Northern Rhodesia and Gambia were among those that achieved independence from Britain on the African continent (along with many others that followed), further undermining the rapidly declining Empire in the process.

Some of the 'black' nationalist regimes and the 'whites-only' administrations that went on to eventually take power in many of these countries would cause significant difficulties for future British governments in the years ahead. However, Britain could not politically or financially retain control of such a wide range of countries. It would damage its international reputation if it was seen as standing in the way of legitimate nationalist expression, particularly as the concept of 'empire' appeared increasingly outdated. In Britain's defence, it dealt with departing its Empire in a much more civilised and stable (non-violent) manner than some other European nations.

Some British politicians feared a subsequent surge in non-white immigration from such former colonies, and this resulted in the government monitoring such levels for fear of further social unrest developing, and the National Front emerged as the hard-line symbol of this feeling in 1967. Harold Macmillan's Government subsequently passed the **1962 Commonwealth Immigrants Act** which significantly tightened up the regulations for those seeking to live in the UK, and ended the automatic right to live in Britain for citizens of former UK colonies. However, Irish citizens were exempt from its provisions and continued to migrate to Britain in significant numbers, and it seemed to be geared towards limiting non-white immigration in particular (in the name of maintaining social harmony in some multi-ethnic areas). The Act was defended as follows by the then Home Secretary Rab Butler:

> *The justification for the control which is included in this Bill, which I shall describe in more detail in a few moments, is that a sizeable part of the entire population of the earth is at present legally entitled to come and stay in this already densely populated country.*[12]

Questions and Talking Points

1. What sort of social change was taking place in Britain during the 1950s?
2. What kinds of social tensions were evident in Britain as the 1950s progressed?
3. How successfully did the Conservative government of this decade deal with such tensions?

12 Rab Butler, *Hansard, House of Commons Debates*, 16th November 1961. ***http://hansard.millbanksystems.com/commons/1961/nov/16/commonwealth-immigrants-bill#S5CV0649P0_19611116_HOC_285***

Labour Party divisions in the 1950s

Despite a range of external problems across the declining Empire, including the humiliation at Suez and simmering racial tensions in the UK, the Conservatives were boosted by a divided Labour Party which had been plagued by ideological arguments towards the end of its term in office up to 1951 about funding for the NHS. Many of its big hitters such as *Attlee, Morrison, Cripps* and *Bevin* had faded from the political scene when it lost power, and the divisions continued while the party faced a prolonged spell in political opposition as the 1950s progressed.

Following Attlee's retirement, Labour's new leader from 1955 was **Hugh Gaitskell** (*below*), who was from the party's moderate wing and who struggled to make an impact in such testing circumstances. Yet the party was clearly divided between its moderate and left-wing factions, and this division saw it fail to exploit Conservative problems regarding the Suez Crisis of 1956.

Gaitskell blamed the party's disappointingly heavy election loss in 1959 on the left-wing influence within the party, as represented by the *'Keep Left'* faction of MPs and activists. In fact, both wings of the divided Labour movement blamed each other for the party's comprehensive defeat to Macmillan's buoyant Conservatives in 1959. It has since been observed by various historians that divided parties tend not to do well at general elections.

The moderate right of the party was represented by Gaitskell along with other reformist figures such as Anthony Crosland. Crosland argued in his book (*The Future of Socialism*, 1956) that capitalism had been successfully tamed and reformed by the growing welfare state. This angered many on the Labour left and within the trade unions, particularly so when in 1959 Gaitskell tried and failed to amend the party's symbolic 'Clause 4' commitment to the **nationalisation** (state control) of industry, a sign of his moderate image but which ultimately ended in political defeat. The left-wing of the party were pro-nationalisation and didn't think that the Labour government of 1945–1951 had gone far enough in terms of the state taking sufficient control of various industries.

Cold War and the nuclear weapons debate

Many on the socialist left wing of Labour remained under the influence of **Nye Bevan** *(right, known as the Bevanites)* and were ultimately unhappy with the direction of the party's domestic and foreign policy under Gaitskell from the mid-1950s. Bevan remained in a senior party position until 1960, serving as both Shadow Foreign Secretary and deputy leader, so he remained of some prominence and significance until this point. Their criticism of Gaitskell's leadership particularly related to him moving the party away from further and more radical nationalisation, as well his moderate position that supported post-war rearmament and the development of nuclear weapons. At their eventful 1959 and 1960 annual conferences, Labour fiercely argued over this military issue, and this created further internal division by defying the party leadership and adopting a policy of **unilateral nuclear disarmament.**

The alternative position of favouring rearmament and obtaining nuclear weapons was shared by both moderates within the Conservative and Labour parties, and it could be linked to the UK's emergence as a key ally of the USA within a **Cold War** environment. This made post-war British governments broadly hostile to the American enemy in this sustained international conflict – namely the Soviet Union.

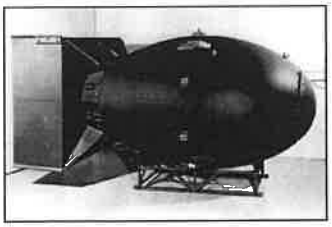
Key Event: The Cold War

A state of political tension and military rivalry between nations that stopped short of full-scale war, especially that which existed between the United States and the Soviet Union following World War II.

This more mainstream **multilateral** view, therefore, argued that nuclear weapons acted as a **'deterrent'** during a time of Cold War tensions, and by having them it was said to make an attack by a hostile power less likely. This position also argued that for there to be any possibility of future weapons reductions among various nuclear powers, having such weapons in the first place would improve a country's international status, strength and diplomatic debating position in this respect. The issue of Britain having a so-called 'nuclear deterrent' was, therefore, a key political debate of this period of heightened international tensions, with supporters of such weapons arguing that the possession of such weapons would deter other countries from attacking.

Left-wing Labour figures, however, could be said to have had more sympathy with the socialist Soviet Union than the capitalist USA, and this association was often used to further damage the Labour Party during this period when it was unpopular with the electorate. **Unilateral disarmament**, would entail Britain giving up her fairly brief ownership of nuclear weapons without any agreement that other countries did likewise. This **unilateral** view was also heavily influenced by the **Campaign for Nuclear Disarmament (CND,** *see logo right*), which had been formed in 1957 to combat the emergence of nuclear military weapons.

Yet this 'unilateral' position was not only detached from moderate opinion in both major parties, it also didn't go down well with key sections of the electorate due to the ongoing **Cold War,** general post-war international tensions and the UK's membership of the western military alliance NATO since the late 1940s. However, the party's more moderate party leadership eventually won control of the issue by the early 1960s, and reversed the conference decision to support multilateralism in 1964.



This view accepted the need for a nuclear deterrent to protect the country's international interests and domestic security. Gaitskell and his 'multilateral' supporters ultimately felt that the party had to adopt a more moderate stance on such issues to keep in touch with 'patriotic' opinion and improve the party's electoral prospects after three successive general election defeats.

The emerging issue of Europe

Labour's internal distractions means that as a party it failed to exploit the erratic *'stop-go'* economic policies of the Conservatives as the 1950s progressed, or to argue for the economic need for Britain to join the *European Economic Community* (EEC) when it was formed following the **Treaty of Rome** in 1957. Pro-European politicians felt that such cooperation with other European nations would help prevent further British economic decline (particularly after the 1956 Suez crisis and the disastrous attempt by Eden to invade Egypt and topple President Nasser). It was also felt that such closer European relations would create jobs, consolidate Britain's global influence and establish harmonious post-war relations.

The issue of the developing European Community would be a major one for British politics in the decades that followed. While not being one of the original six members of the EEC, Britain did join the alternative **European Free Trade Association (EFTA)** in 1960 – along with six generally smaller and weaker European nations (*Norway, Sweden, Switzerland, Portugal, Denmark and Austria).* However, it became quickly clear that EFTA was an insignificant body in comparison to the EEC, and in 1961 (fuelled by economic motives) Macmillan's government belatedly applied for EEC membership. However, this was rejected by France's President De Gaulle in 1963, who resented Britain's 'special relationship' with the USA (as promoted by some key figures such as Churchill), who was also annoyed that Britain had not wished to join in the first place, and who also feared Britain had too many economic/industrial problems to burden the EEC with.

In hindsight, by the early 1960s the cross-party pro-European viewpoint argued that it had been a mistake not to have joined this body from the outset, as, in the years that followed, countries such as France and Germany enjoyed higher levels of economic growth than the UK (see information below).

Economic growth rates between 1955–1975

UK	–	2.8%
France	–	5.4%
West Germany	–	5.7%
Italy	–	5.4%

Overall production increases between 1955–1975

UK	–	30%
France	–	75%
West Germany	–	90%

While all such increases could be generally connected to post-war stability and the resumption of established pre-war trading patterns, the members of the EEC such as West Germany, France and Italy could be said to have benefited further from increased trade and demand from other EEC countries. However, there were many in both major UK political parties who adopted the more isolationist approach and who felt Britain was still a big enough power in its own right and did not need such European trading alliances. There was also some lingering anti-German feeling in Britain which remained suspicious of Germany's involvement in the blossoming EEC, and a fear that joining the EEC at this point may have disrupted the post-war economic recovery that was in progress.

✓ For joining the EEC	✘ Against joining the EEC
Greater trade opportunities	Loss of sovereignty and national status
Maintain international political status	Admission that Britain no longer a great power and could undermine 'special relationship' with USA
Create extra jobs	The Empire was arguably still Britain's foreign priority
Create greater economic growth and stability	Lingering post-war hostility to Germany
Prevent likelihood of further war	Britain's geographical isolation from rest of Europe

The end of Conservative dominance in the early 1960s

The failure of stop-go policies

Despite three successive election victories, however, by the late 1950s, fuelled by growing prosperity, various underlying problems were beginning to emerge for the ruling Conservative Party, despite another emphatic election victory in 1959 when their parliamentary majority actually increased. Key problems and criticisms (focusing largely on the 'stop-go' nature of the economy) included:

- A missed opportunity to join the EEC, with other European nations enjoying advanced economic growth by comparison in the 1950s, e.g. in the late 1950s Britain's economic growth was 2.8% compared to West Germany's 5.7%.
- Rising unemployment *(peaking at 900,000 by winter 1963)* as part of an economic downturn. This in turn provoked growing unrest from the trade union movement (many of whose members suffered as a result), and which had become increasingly powerful after World War II. Some of the worst affected areas were the locations of the UK's traditional staple industries, mainly located in the north of the country, which had not been sufficiently invested in during the 1950s.
- A record balance of payments deficit for 1964 of £748 million, which had steadily grown from the late 1950s onwards and could be linked to **'stop-go'** economics.
- Deflationary policies (such as raising interest rates), pursued by Chancellor Selwyn Lloyd from 1961 damaged economic growth. Following this, Chancellor Maudling in particular sought to instil some significant economic 'planning' in the form of the **National Economic Development Council (known as 'NEDDY')** from 1962, which built on the **National Incomes Commission (known as 'NICKY')**, which from 1961 aimed to regulate wage increases so as to control inflationary pressures. However, both 'NEDDY' and 'NICKY' failed to work as proposed, and the economy did not improve as envisaged. This failed approach to economic planning and intervention convinced younger MPs like Margaret Thatcher that a different approach was required in the future.
- Overall failure to invest in key industries, manage economic growth, control inflation (which was rising) and the national balance of payments – resulting in a **'stop-go'** economy.

Evidence of declining public support for the Conservatives was obvious in March 1962, when the ultra-safe seat of Orpington was lost to the Liberals on a 27% swing. Macmillan's response was a brutal cull of his cabinet in July, with six ministers sacked in what became known as **'The Night of the Long Knives'**. Many argued that this indicated a sense of panic among the Conservative leadership and hastened Macmillan's departure. To further damage the Conservatives, two scandals then erupted that had maximum impact at the height of the **'Cold War'** with the Communist regime of the Soviet Union.

1. **The Vassall Scandal:** In October 1962, a clerk at the Admiralty, *William Vassall*, was found guilty of spying for Communist Russia. Two government ministers, *Lord Carrington and T. Galbraith* were also accused of covering up the scandal but later cleared. The affair damaged the government's reputation at a particularly tense time in foreign affairs.
2. **The Profumo Affair:** A worse scandal erupted when, in June 1963, it was claimed that *John Profumo,* War Minister in the Conservative government, was having an affair with Christine Keeler, a London showgirl. Rumours had circulated for some time and the scandal deepened when it emerged that Keeler was also having a relationship with a Russian diplomat. Given Profumo's position and the ongoing Cold War, the security implications were significant and he was forced to resign.

Both scandals attached an element of *'sleaze'* to the government of Macmillan, and the recently installed Labour leader Harold Wilson (who took over following High Gaitskell's sudden death in 1963) made some effective attacks on the Conservative administration as a result.

Task

To find out more about the Profumo Affair of 1962–1963, watch the film *Scandal (1989)* which focuses on this political episode.

**Be aware that while there are lots of factual events in such films, there is also often bias and a certain viewpoint being promoted at times.*

In October 1963, Harold Macmillan resigned as prime minister as the various Conservative problems took their toll on his health. He was seen as something of a political dinosaur in the so-called *'swinging sixties'*, but in this context was surprisingly succeeded by the Foreign Secretary, **Sir Alec Douglas-Home**, who had the added problem of being a peer (Lord) and not an MP. Following a hastily arranged parliamentary by-election *(in Perthshire, Scotland)* that provided him with a Commons seat in November 1963, Home succeeded Macmillan and remained prime minister until Labour took power in October 1964. Home was selected in a most undemocratic way and emerged as leader after *'soundings'* were taken among senior Conservatives. He was popular within the Conservative Party and generally viewed as an effective politician, however the Labour opposition claimed:

> *(His) aristocratic background, his lack of experience in the Commons and his remoteness from ordinary people made him totally unsuitable for the leadership of the country.*[13]

Despite such contrasting leaders (with Wilson of more humble and lower-middle-class origin), as well as a 'modernised' and unified Labour Party, Labour only squeezed back into power in 1964 with a slender parliamentary majority of just four, despite the incoming Prime Minister Harold Wilson claiming that there had been *'thirteen wasted years'* of Conservative government in terms of both economic and social policies. This was partly because Home retained some strong political appeal to many voters:

> *Sir Alec was generally respected for his honesty. He was one of the least devious politicians and one of the nicest and least conceited to become prime minister. Despite Vassall and Profumo, the party almost pulled off a fourth victory.*
>
> (Source: Robert Blake, *The Conservative Party from Peel to Thatcher* (1985)

Although the party had lost approximately 1.75 million voters since 1959, this electoral outcome only narrowly ended thirteen years of Conservative rule, and the close nature of the result appeared to be further evidence of the depth of Conservative support and the strong class-based social and political divisions of the time. This trend of 'two-party' class-based politics had escalated since the end of the war and now appeared to be reaching its peak, with most of the middle classes behind the Conservatives and the working class supporting Labour in large numbers.

13 Norman Lowe, *Mastering Modern British History* (1989), Ch. 29, p. 579.

As an ultimate commentary on this period, it can be argued that as the 1950s progressed there was certainly evidence of significant prosperity, but this could not be sustained across all sections of society. It, therefore, seemed that the Conservatives had not taken full advantage of the post-war economic boom they had inherited in 1951. Consequently, by the early 1960s it was argued by one prominent historian that *'genuine gains were made but that the chance to modernise the industrial structure of Britain was not fully taken'* (Nigel Fisher, *Harold Macmillan*, 1982).

Historical Interpretations

The left-of-centre analysis of this period of history is that they were 'thirteen wasted years', as claimed by the future Labour Prime Minister (from 1964) Harold Wilson. This viewpoint has claimed that a lack of sustained investment in key industries hampered Britain's economic growth, possibly fuelled further by a failure to join the EEC.

However, an alternative analysis of this period was that there was generally positive economic growth and social mobility throughout the period, representing a 'Golden Age' of growth according to Conservative historians such as Robert Blake. Even the left-wing historian Eric Hobsbawm supported this opinion, claiming that such growth continued until the early 1970s prior to the outbreak of major economic and industrial problems.

Exercise: Model Essay Plan

To what extent can the period 1951–1964 be accurately described as 'thirteen wasted years'?

Introduction (focus on and address the question title)

- *Where is the quote from? What other historical explanations are there?*
- *What areas and policy examples could be considered in order to assess the argument?*

Economic	Key arguments in favour and evidence:	Key arguments against and evidence:	**Historical interpretations to consider:**
Social	Key arguments in favour and evidence:	Key arguments against and evidence:	**Historical interpretations to consider:**
Political	Key arguments in favour and evidence:	Key arguments against and evidence:	**Historical interpretations to consider:**

Conclusion: Focus on the question title and address the issues raised in the main body of the answer, attempting to reach a measured judgment if possible.

Revision Exercise: Conservative Government 1951–1964

Outline the key successes and failures of the Conservative governments of 1951–1964

Policy/ Issue	Successes	Failures
Political		
Economic		
Social		
Cultural		

Exercise: Key Revision Questions 1951–1964

Revision Quiz

1. Which political party dominated government in the 1950s? **(1)**

.....

2. What name was given to the style of economic management adopted by the government in the 1950s? **(1)**

.....

3. What was 'consumerism' and what was the evidence of it during the 1950s? **(2)**

.....

.....

4. List the Conservative prime ministers between 1951 and 1964. **(4)**

.....

.....

.....

.....

5. What term was used to describe the similarity between Conservative and Labour policies during the 1950s and early 1960s? **(1)**

.....

6. Why was Alec Douglas-Home an unusual choice as Conservative leader in 1963 given the changes in British society at the time? **(1)**

.....

Total: ..... OUT OF 10

The Affluent Society (1951–1964) – Springboard 1

Discussion Points

1. What was the impact of the 'Attlee legacy' on the Conservative governments of 1951–1964?
2. What were the key reasons for the Conservative Party's political dominance of this historical period?
3. How can the Conservative Party's record on the economy be assessed during this period? Were there more positives or negatives?
4. How did imperial and foreign affairs impact on the Conservative Party's record in office during this period?
5. What were the most notable social tensions that existed during this period? Were some more significant than others?
6. To what extent had a political consensus developed during this period?
7. Summarise the key reasons why Britain did not join the European Economic Community (EEC) during this period. What were the key arguments for and against?
8. Why did the Conservatives lose power in 1964?

The Sixties (1964–1970)

The Wilson Government

Following on from a relatively successful six years in office between 1945 and 1951, few would have predicted it would be another 13 years before Labour would take office again, and then only by a wafer-thin parliamentary majority of just four seats. Yet the party returned to power in 1964, in circumstances summed up by incoming cabinet minister Tony Benn as follows:

> *There is an overall Labour majority of four only. Home has resigned the premiership and Harold Wilson has formed a government. We've waited thirteen years for this.*[14]

Although this return to government after such a long exile appeared to heal the party splits of the 1950s in the short term, once in power under **Harold Wilson,** Labour continued to face internal disputes and the development of a struggle between moderate social democrats and left-wing socialists. Such divisions had originally emerged towards the end of its time in office in 1950–1951, and this inter-party dispute would plague its existence and performance over much of the remainder of the twentieth century. One commentator has observed that this party division hampered Wilson's performance as prime minister:

> ***'Harold Wilson...proved himself to be a masterly leader of the opposition.'***
> *Source: Robert Blake,* The Conservative Party from Peel to Thatcher *(1985)*
>
> ***Could he repeat this performance as prime minister?***

> *He was so crippled by trying to placate the various gangs that he could offer no clear direction for the country.*[15]

Wilson *(left)* had broadly succeeded where Attlee and Gaitskell had failed in 1955 and 1959 by uniting Labour and successfully exploiting the discontent towards the end of the Conservatives' prolonged period in office. He argued with some degree of success that 1951–1964 had represented *'thirteen wasted years'*, given that there were growing economic problems and social tensions when the Conservatives left office.

Scientific developments

Wilson ruthlessly attacked Home as an aristocratic *'caretaker'* prime minister and at the 1963 Labour Party Conference in Scarborough, where his so-called 'white heat' speech utilised language that highlighted his modernising image and credentials:

> *The Britain that is going to be forged in the white heat of this revolution will be no place for restrictive practices or for outdated measures on either side of industry.*

In referring to the *'white heat'* of scientific developments and technological progress, Wilson aligned himself with a more modern image of the *'swinging'* 1960s. Such a phrase linked in with developments such as the space race and new industry and computer technology, and contrasted quite sharply with the more aristocratic and 'stuffy' image of his immediate Conservative predecessors as prime minister.

14 Tony Benn, *Out of the Wilderness: Diaries 1963–1967* (1987), Diary entry Friday 16th October 1964, p. 154.
15 Andrew Marr, *A History of Modern Britain* (2007), p. 188.

Wilson and Labour promised to use such new scientific and technological innovations to improve and further develop the welfare state, modernise the country's institutions and bring more planning into economic matters. Scientific developments helped to expand the consumer choice for the UK's citizens in terms of purchasing more advanced technical goods such as cars, televisions and other domestic electrical equipment such as fridges, washing machines, etc. This desire for technological and scientific improvement led some Labour politicians to seek to move closer to the emerging European Economic Community (EEC) as a means of sharing best practice and improving trade and technological links. Both domestic and international scientific developments created greater choice for women in the form of the wider availability of the contraceptive pill from the 1960s onwards.

Wilson's ideology and leadership

Labour sought to align itself with these 'modern' developments, and this consequently generated a more modern image than Home's outdated Conservatives. Social democracy appeared popular again, and Wilson's public image was cultivated in a positive way and he exploited the increasing importance of the media and television coverage:

> *His superb television technique together with his familiar pipe and Gannex raincoat combined to project the image of the capable and reliable father-figure who had the country's fortunes well under control.*[16]

However, Wilson also had a left-wing legacy and background, having won key support from within the Labour Party for being one of the two junior ministers who had joined Bevan in resigning over the introduction of various NHS charges in 1951. On this basis, he had to be pragmatic while in office; balancing his radical past with a modernising and reformist image for the present.

After taking office in October 1964 with a small parliamentary majority of only four, in March 1966 Wilson capitalised on positive economic developments and a bright start to his term of office by calling an early election and increasing Labour's majority to a healthy 96 *(see table below)*. This gave him a stronger mandate to mould Britain in a way that he desired, and part of Wilson's *'modernising'* image appeared to be in relation to social attitudes.

Party	*MPs*	
	1964	**1966**
Labour	317	363
Conservative	304	253
Liberal	9	12

16 Norman Lowe, *Mastering Modern British History* (1989), Ch. 31, p. 619.

Liberal reforming legislation and progress towards female equality

During Wilson's term of office until 1970, Britain experienced what became known as *'The Swinging Sixties'*, where a liberalisation of attitudes brought some radical reform in the area of social policy in particular, which in turn had major effects on everyday life in Britain. Under the stewardship of Home Secretary **Roy Jenkins**, Britain embraced the legalisation of abortion (up to 28 weeks), the de-criminalisation of homosexuality (both 1967), and the relaxation of divorce laws (1969). By the early 1970s, the greater availability of the contraceptive pill also marked a further stage in enhancing women's social freedom.

Many such reforms reflected growing demands for gender equality and the rise of **'feminism,'** 'gender politics' and the 'women's liberation movement' in particular, which were growing global influences that also became evident in demands for greater equality of pay and specific rights for women. However, such reforms affecting women could be said to have benefited the more educated, middle-class females than the working classes.

> ***Feminism***
> The doctrine that men and women should receive equal treatment in all spheres and aspects of life.

Other 'moralistic' reforms of this period included the abolition of the death penalty (1965) as well as the ending of state censorship of 'offensive' stage/theatre plays (such as Lady Chatterley's Lover), and productions (1968 Theatres Act). The abolition of the death penalty (capital punishment) and the liberalising of abortion were introduced via **private members' bills**, whereby backbench MPs initiate a law which has the support of the government.

This relatively radical liberalising agenda, which in practice made many previously prohibited activities perfectly legal, has meant that Jenkins:

> *Has been either praised or demonised as the most liberal Home Secretary in British history, the man more responsible for the permissive society than any other.*[17]

While more positive and liberal viewpoints saw his progressive social policies as evidence that Britain was entering a more enlightened, equal and tolerant era, not all of public opinion was supportive of such measures, and British social attitudes remained difficult to shift in the short term at least. Many on the conservative right of politics have continuously blamed Jenkins' social reforms for the breakdown of discipline and respect in society (as they saw it) in the subsequent years, leading to the creation of a **'permissive society'**.

Educational reform

In other areas of social policy, in 1969 Wilson's Labour administration created the **Open University**, a radical idea that allowed students to study from home and which developed the notion of a more accessible system of *'distance learning'*. It is seen as one of this administration's most enduring and greatest legacies. Also in education, Labour challenged the 1944 Butler Act which had established the divisions between *'grammar'* and *'secondary modern'* schools in the immediate aftermath of World War II.

17 Andrew Marr, *A History of Modern Britain* (2007), p. 252.

Consequently, it was during this period from 1964 to 1970 that Labour developed and rolled-out the policy of **'comprehensive schools'**, which aimed to remove (or at least reduce) the principle of academic selection from the education system. This comprehensive policy was viewed as a more egalitarian means of ending the divisive aspects of the post-war education system in Britain, as it was becoming increasingly apparent by the mid-1960s that the education system was increasingly unequal, with middle-class grammar schools achieving better results and being better resourced, and with failure at the 'eleven plus' exam significantly harming a child's university chances or longer-term career opportunities.

This policy approach originated in *'Circular 10/65'* which was a government document of 1965 instructing local education authorities to create comprehensive schools (taking all pupils regardless of academic ability). The policy was further developed during the 1970s, despite initial criticism of this policy from the Conservative opposition.

The comprehensive policy is specifically associated with **Anthony Crosland**, Secretary of State for Education from 1965 to 1967. Crosland infamously declared that he wanted to close down every grammar school in the country, primarily because he had concluded that they were a source of social division and inequality. It was, therefore, argued by reforming Labour politicians that the selective grammar school system ultimately restricted (rather than improved), **social mobility** within British society, as well as re-enforcing rather than removing existing class divisions.

Public protest and relations with the USA

Further social progress and improved educational citizenship was evident in the **1969 Representation of the People Act,** where the first major voting reform for over 50 years saw the age of eligibility to vote reduced from 21 to 18. This marked the culmination of a decade of significant social change and reflected the mood of change alongside growing demands on government from the more radical, younger and better-educated sections of society, which was a phenomenon that was sweeping much of the western world.

This became evident in a growth in student protests against the unpopular **Vietnam War** from the mid to late 1960s, and which reflected high levels of intellectual and educated opinion opposed to the war. There were over 200 arrests following anti-war protests outside the American Embassy in London in March 1968, and this was similar to protests in other parts of Europe. For his part, Prime Minister Wilson had earned credit from both his party and from sections of the public by turning down the requests of US President Lyndon Johnson to send British troops into the prolonged conflict which lasted approximately a decade between 1965 and 1975.

Musical influences from the likes of the American singer *Bob Dylan (left)* chimed into this mood of social unrest and protest, specifically with his symbolic 1964 song *'The Times they are changin'*. Such dissenting trends that questioned established authority could also be linked to the growth of political satire that challenged British traditions in a mocking yet amusing way. A good example of such satire was the innovative TV programme *'That Was The Week That Was'* (broadcast 1962–1963).

For Your Information

The Vietnam War (1965–1975)

- Following American fears of the spread of communism across south east Asia, conflict erupted in Vietnam in 1965.
- It was primarily fought between the USA and the North Vietnamese Communist regime, whose army (the Vietcong) engaged in aggressive guerrilla warfare which American troops struggled to deal with (despite their superior resources).
- This conflict marked a significant extension of the Cold War and its prolonged nature put significant political and social pressures on successive American governments.
- It ended inconclusively in 1975, although many have viewed it as a humiliating episode for the superpower of the USA, with the whole of Vietnam eventually succumbing to communism. It resulted in the deaths of approximately 57,000 American soldiers, with another 300,000 injured, as well as almost half a million North Vietnamese fatalities and over 600,000 civilian deaths.

Changes in moral attitudes

Such social changes led to changing moral attitudes. Examples of this included non-conformist behaviour as evident in youth culture (e.g. mods and rockers in the 1960s and, later, punks in the 1970s), emerging women's liberation groups, or satirical work in published or broadcast format, which were vigorously condemned by the country's conservative establishment. High-profile public figures such as Mary Whitehouse of the *'National Viewers and Listeners' Association'* (founded in 1965) often voiced outrage at what they perceived to be a lack of 'morality' within such increased levels of social liberalism. This body was particularly outraged at what it felt were growing trends of violence, sex and blasphemy within broadcasting and British popular culture. An example of this could be seen in the strong conservative reaction to Philip Larkin's poem *'Annus Mirabilis'* (published 1967), due to its specific sexual content.

'Modern' social issues were covered in televised plays such as *Cathy Come Home*, written by left-wing playwright Ken Loach and broadcast on BBC1 in 1966. This programme generated a huge level of public interest in the issue of homelessness, which had previously not been highlighted on a large scale across much of British society. The growth of television (with colour TVs available from the late 1960s) and more advanced transistor radios, further encouraged the spread of such new social issues and entertainment tastes, often via imported American TV programmes in particular. The role of women, teenagers and non-white groups also came to have a bigger influence and steadily increasing presence within 1960s British society, which again challenged the traditional social and cultural model of the country.

However, it should be noted that not all traditional aspects of British culture suddenly came to an end from the 1960s onwards. This was particularly evident in TV programmes such as the *Black and White Minstrel Show*, which could be said to have been in conflict with more progressive liberal tastes and preferences. However, it was an example of a conservative-themed programme which continued to broadcast on the BBC until the late 1970s. Society in general also continued to maintain key values such as religion, monarchy, law and order and political stability (with occasional exceptions such as the 1968 anti-Vietnam War marches and subsequent unrest in London).

It must also be stressed that popular cultural influences were not the only reason why social change took place. Government policies such as comprehensive education could be cited as an alternative factor, as could the economic changes that created more consumerism (e.g. the desire for non-essential and often luxury items). Both factors could be said to have resulted in a more liberal and fluid society with enhanced levels of **social mobility**. It could also be argued that television programmes didn't shape social change but merely reflected it, with themes such as feminism, youth rebellion, sexual liberation and social liberalism already well established as trends within society.

Racial controversy and immigration (1960s)

Significant numbers of non-white ethnic groups had arrived in Britain after World War II, encouraged by the post-war Labour government to fill vital gaps in the employment market. However, as the 1950s and 1960s progressed, an influx of non-whites began to have a visible demographic effect on some parts of Britain, notably in several inner-city communities where concentrations of black and Asian populations became evident, much to the anxiety of some of the indigenous white inhabitants. Cultural evidence of this could be seen in the growth of Indian restaurants within various towns and cities during the 1950s and 1960s.

By the early 1960s, immigration levels were being more closely monitored, and Macmillan's Conservative government subsequently passed the **1962 Commonwealth Immigrants Act,** partly in response to growing racial tensions and public concern over this issue. At the 1964 general election, the Conservative candidate at Smethwick, Birmingham, exploited this burgeoning racial tension by being elected on the back of the inflammatory racist slogan: *'If you want a nigger for a neighbour, vote Labour'.* Such controversial language (which if used in later years would be illegal) provoked great controversy, but at the time was deemed to be an acceptable form of electioneering.

Key Question

What does the above slogan and language used reveal about the nature of British society in the 1960s?

Such developments also reflected the growing presence of far-right-wing parties such as the National Front (NF) that had begun to make some impact in ethnically-mixed parts of the UK as the 1960s progressed. Labour's response to this brewing racial tension was to legislate, and two **Race Relations Acts** were passed in 1965 and 1968, aimed at prohibiting racism in the workplace, education and in everyday life, quite a momentous and possibly unrealistic policy to aspire to given the diversities and prejudices of the British public.

Labour was vulnerable to accusations that it was *'soft'* on the issue of immigration given that the majority of non-white immigrants increasingly formed part of its core vote. The issue exploded to a new level in April 1968 when prominent Conservative shadow minister **Enoch Powell** made his now famous **'Rivers of Blood'** speech in Birmingham. Powell claimed that racial tensions were simmering and would soon lead to violent conflict between whites and non-whites, and he had a great deal of public support in saying so. The phrase *'Rivers of Blood'* was actually a reference to classical literature, and there has been fierce debate in the ensuing years as to whether Powell was being racist or merely wished to open a debate on the issue of race and immigration.

As a result of his comments, Powell gained some significant support from many working-class members of society, notably the London dockers who marched in support of his comments. Many believe his words have proved to be prophetic as the years have progressed, but it was too much for Conservative leader Edward Heath to bear, and Powell was sacked for a speech that according to Heath *'was racialist in tone and liable to exacerbate racial tensions'*.[18] Powell believed he was speaking for the West Midlands community that he represented *(as a Wolverhampton MP)* where growing ethnic populations were already significant in some parts. Labour's somewhat panicked response was in the form of the **Commonwealth Immigration Act (1968)** which modified the 1962 legislation and made it more difficult to settle in the UK from the **Commonwealth**. This Act was criticised for being illiberal and reactionary by more left-wing elements within the Labour Party.

> ***Commonwealth***
> Founded in 1931, a loose association of former British imperial colonies and territories.

Successive British governments ultimately needed to strike a balance between limiting large-scale immigration, yet also providing opportunities for immigrants to work in the UK and to counter balance emigration levels out of Britain. The former Empire continued to cause problems in this policy area, and in some places, British withdrawal had created something of a 'power vacuum'. A significant development within the African Commonwealth (former British Empire), occurred in late 1965 when the colony of Rhodesia, governed by a white minority leadership, announced a Unilateral Declaration of Independence (UDI) from Britain due to fears that there would be eventual rule by the black majority in the country.

This event caused a major headache for Wilson's administration in dealing with a delicate colonial issue with racial undertones, and it marked a negative consequence of the *'winds of change'* sweeping across Africa as predicted by Harold Macmillan in 1960. As the 1960s progressed, Wilson had to embark on some delicate diplomacy with the Rhodesian Premier Ian Smith, fully aware of the implications for the wider African Commonwealth if the situation between Britain and Rhodesia continued to deteriorate. Sanctions were used against the former colony, and relations with Britain were not restored until the late 1970s.

The break for independence in Rhodesia generated a fierce political debate at home between those who retained strong imperialist tendencies and those who sought to loosen Britain's grip on imperial territories. There were certainly domestic implications in terms of a further surge of immigration into Britain as a result of withdrawal from such territories, with some citizens of the British Empire choosing to live in the 'Mother Country'.

Such difficulties in the African continent, in particular, fuelled by growing demands for complete independence from across the former Empire, led to British foreign policy in this period effectively seeking the withdrawal of all military bases and commitments **'East of Suez'** (primarily Asia and the Middle East) between the years 1967–1971. This was a pragmatic response to the military costs of maintaining an ongoing military and strategic presence in such regions in the context of the decline of the British Empire, as well as bowing to the demands for self-determination from former colonies across the globe.

A contrasting imperial viewpoint was that such a policy represented a sell-out of British interests but this was an increasingly minority position. The death of Winston Churchill in 1965 was somewhat symbolic, with one of the great champions of the British Empire dying amidst a period of significant imperial decline. Such colonial issues with domestic repercussions indicated a further erosion of the post-war consensus that had initially existed in the years after the end of World War II.

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18 Andrew Marr, *A History of Modern Britain* (2007), p. 304.

Questions and Talking Points

1. What were the key race-related issues facing the UK during the 1960s?
2. How and why did such issues have an impact on UK domestic policies?
3. Discuss the arguments for and against Britain allowing people from former British colonies to live in the UK.

Exercise: Labour's Social Policies (1964–1970)

Can you prioritise Labour's most significant and enduring social policies between 1964 and 1970, providing reasons for your answer?
1.
2.
3.
4.
5.

Social and cultural change in the 1960s

A significant factor behind social change in Britain from the 1960s onwards was the various movements taking place within popular culture. For example, popular music of the so-called 'Swinging Sixties' challenged long-established social attitudes and opinions, with British groups such as *The Beatles* (*below*, formed 1960) and *The Rolling Stones* (formed 1962) rising to prominence with a new 'rock and roll' style that generated huge levels of popularity, particularly among the younger generations. Such was the popularity of the Beatles, in particular, that a mood known as 'Beatlemania' was said to have developed within youth culture. Such developments had built on the appeal and impact of American musical influences such as Elvis Presley during the 1950s, and these musical factors and the growth of the nightclub scene influenced a growing non-conformist 'teenage' or youth culture. This incorporated increased levels of personal (often sexual) liberation, a growth in recreational drug use and new non-conventional fashions such as the miniskirt.

Growth of leisure activities

Improved working conditions led to enhanced and prolonged leisure time for much of the population. In terms of the evolution of mass tourism, although car ownership continued to grow and impact on people's lifestyles, the expansion of air travel in the post-war era meant that increasing numbers of British holidaymakers were visiting the sunnier parts of Europe.

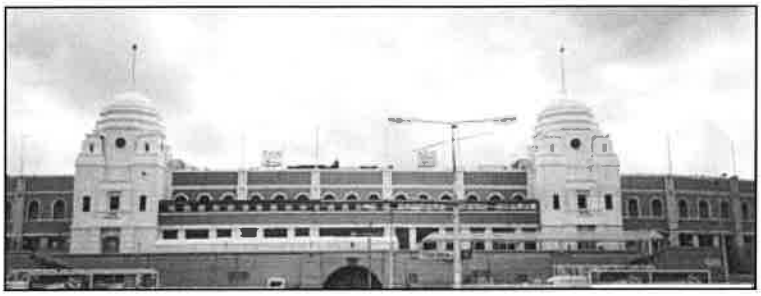
Of particular popularity were Spain and other Mediterranean countries, as a boom in relatively cheap **'package holidays'** triggered the long-term decline of the traditional British seaside resorts. In 1950 one million British citizens travelled abroad on holiday, by 1961 the figure was approximately four million, by the early 1970s it was over seven million and rising, and was pushing up to 13 million by the early 1980s (see table below).

Package Holiday

A holiday (usually abroad) whereby the travel and accommodation are all included in the price. They became increasingly popular in Britain from the 1960s onwards.

UK citizens travelling abroad on holiday	
1950	1 million
1961	4 million
1971	7 million
1973	9 million
1981	13 million

Adapted from sources: **www.bbc.co.uk** and Dominic Sandbrook, *Seasons in the Sun: The Battle for Britain, 1974–1979* (2012).



Since the 1920s, popular spectator sports had been a steadily growing influence in Britain, and by the 1960s many were peaking in their public appeal, notably the sports of football, horse racing and cricket. At the national football stadium of Wembley (*above*) in the summer of 1966, the English football team (captained by the iconic figure of Bobby Moore and managed by Alf Ramsey), won the World Cup for its one and only time, beating West Germany in a match watched by almost 97,000 in the stadium and an estimated 30 million TV viewers at home. By the 1966–1967 season, total football attendances in England peaked at just over 30 million, but a notable decline set in after this which could be linked to a fall in living standards and less money for such activities from the late 1960s onwards.

Even though attendance figures dropped for safety reasons, there was still a crowd of almost 60,000 for an FA Cup match between Leeds United and Sunderland in 1967. Football and horse racing were traditionally seen as more appealing to the working classes, with football stadiums located in predominantly industrial parts of towns and cities, and both sports offering a kind of 'escapism' from people's (mainly men's) often dreary working lives. Racecourses also became increasingly popular sporting venues for those from lower social classes who enjoyed a bet in the hope of improving their financial position, although horse owners tended to be from the wealthier upper classes and aristocracy, earning it the unofficial title of the *'Sport of Kings'*.

Key annual horse races included *'The Derby'* and *'The Grand National'*. This significant popularity of such spectator sports, and football in particular, would have an important impact on popular British culture in the twentieth century, with its influence becoming more significant in the post-war era after 1945. Consequently, the culture of *'going to the match'* or *'having a bet'* became deep-rooted within British society as the twentieth century progressed.

More middle-class popular sports were cricket and the slightly less popular tennis, and both were hampered by the fact that fewer schools seemed to participate in such activities, and those that did tended to be the more prosperous grammar and private bodies. Despite this, professional cricket generated some significant popular support (although not on the same scale as football), while *'Wimbledon'* became a major annual tennis tournament (and the world's oldest), based in London and attracting global levels of interest. Another moderately popular spectator sport was rugby, with the 'union' code being more middle and upper-class in terms of its participants, while the league code was more popular in predominantly northern, working-class parts of the country.

Questions and Talking Points

1. What was the extent of poplar cultural change in Britain from the early 1960s onwards?
2. Summarise how the 'Swinging Sixties' challenged and transformed traditional British social values.
3. How had popular spectator sports impacted on British culture by the 1960s?

Much of these social, cultural and moral changes went hand in hand and were well publicised with the expansion of the **'mass media'** – namely the growth of television, radio and (eventually) video usage during this period. While the term 'mass media' had been used in earlier parts of the twentieth century, it was revived during the 1960s and now covered a much wider range of media forms that went beyond the traditional newspaper format. As an illustration of this, the table below highlights the extent of television growth during this decade.

TV ownership in UK in 1960s (figures in millions)

	All homes	Homes with a TV
1960	16.3	11
1961	16.5	12.3
1962	16.6	12.8
1963	16.7	13.6
1964	17	14.2
1965	17.3	14.6
1966	17.8	15.4
1967	18	15.9
1968	18.2	16.4
1969	18.3	16.7
1970	18.4	16.9

Source: http://www.barb.co.uk/resources/tv-ownership/

The majority of the population subsequently came to own a television within a short space of time (by the late 1960s), and as evidence of this, by 1969 over 16 million households had a TV licence.[19] This reflected approximately three-quarters of the overall population (and steadily growing), as the cost of television ownership became far more affordable to average families. They were still black and white at this stage, with colour not arriving until the late 1960s, and then to only a small number of households.

Such levels of interest in this new technology was further boosted by the emergence of new TV channels in the early 1960s such as BBC2 and ITV (with BBC1 having been established to limited audiences in the mid-1930s).

Politicians subsequently had to adapt to such changes, having to become more accomplished and skilled in dealing with a widening and more demanding media focus covering new technology. This was particularly so in relation to television and the ever-widening number of people who owned TV sets. TV interviews with politicians, therefore, became more common and prominent, so that politicians of all parties could try to appeal to the electorate directly in their homes. Several figures, such as Labour politician Tony Benn, had a background in working in media production, and this certainly helped them in this respect.

19 http://www.barb.co.uk/resources/tv-facts/tv-ownership

Party political broadcasts and press conferences also became common features of British politics as a means of satisfying the wider number of media outlets covering both print and broadcast. See examples on the weblinks below of *Labour Party and Conservative Party general election broadcasts in 1964*, which look very dated by today's standards, but which represented an advanced use of new television technology at the time.

- Labour Party1964 election broadcast:
  https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=d7mAENNlDqY

- Conservative Party 1964 election broadcast:
  http://pebs.group.shef.ac.uk/conservatives-13th-october-1964

Breakdown of industrial relations in the 1960s

The Labour Party had tended to enjoy close relations with trade unions for most of the twentieth century, and it remained dependent on their financial support and had close institutional links. During the 1960s trade unions were generally popular and membership was high and rising, with approximately half of the working population being members and the unions subsequently carrying great financial and political influence.

Trade Unions

A body of organised workers, usually limited in membership to people working in the same trade and who strive to improve wages and employment conditions.

Trade Union Membership 1945–1979[20]

Year	Trade union membership	% of the workforce
1945	7.8 million	38.6
1960	9.8 million	42
1970	11.1 million	46.5
1975	12 million	48.5
1979	13.5 million	53.4

Key Question

Briefly summarise in a paragraph what the statistics in the above table indicate about the nature of industrial relations and trade union activity during the 'years of consensus' (1945–1979)

20 Trade Union membership levels, British Historical Studies, Department of Employment/Labour Force Survey: *http://www.unionancestors.co.uk/Images/TU%20membership%201900–2000.pdf*

Prime Minister Harold Wilson initially adopted a cosy relationship with trade union leaders, with a *'matey **'beer and sandwiches'** approach'*.[21] Industrial relations had been fairly stable for most of the 1960s as post-war recovery continued, with strikes occurring on a fairly localised scale and inflation remaining low enough (4%) to keep the mass of workers fairly content and wage demands under control. However, rising inflation *(prices)* and unemployment towards the end of the 1960s signalled a change in trade union attitudes.

Dock strikes in London and Liverpool in 1966–1967 brought trade to a standstill and were a sign of things to come in terms of industrial unrest as **7 million working days** were lost in 1967 alone. Along with unofficial strikes in the car industry, this indicated how disruptive and unpredictable strike action was at times. Many in government and wider society began to fear the power wielded by the trade union movement.

i Lower inflation meant lower wage demands

In 1969, in a desperate attempt to curb excessive trade union demands over pay in particular, Labour introduced a White Paper *(proposed law)* entitled ***'In Place of Strife'*** a relatively right-wing piece of legislation for a Labour government. Under the stewardship of **Barbara Castle**, an ostensible left-wing Employment Secretary in Wilson's Government, this proposal was aimed at controlling the power of the trade unions and bringing them more under the control of law by direct government intervention. Castle was one of the most high-profile female politicians in Britain at this time, a number that remained relatively small despite various social and political gains for women over the course of the twentieth century. Castle's proposed reforms included ballots before strikes took place and *'cooling off'* periods before a strike was called. The aim was ultimately:

> *To reform the way in which trade unions behaved in the workplace through the stimulus of the law in order to strengthen them as responsible industrial institutions.* [22]

Extract from 'In Place of Strife' (1969)

> *Encourage a more equitable, ordered and efficient system… The need for state intervention and involvement in association with both sides of industry is now admitted by almost everybody. The question that remains, is what form should it take at the present time?*

The trade unions reacted with anger at this proposal and Wilson's Labour Government ultimately had to back down, *'compelled to stage an undignified retreat'*,[23] despite it being *'a struggle for authority a serious government could not afford to lose'*.[24] The ability of powerful trade union leaders such as **Hugh Scanlon** and **Jack Jones** to make the government effectively *'back off'*, emphasises just how significant trade union power was at the time, and the proposal has been described as a *'disastrously handled plan for a major reform of trade union law.'*[25] Many have viewed this as a wasted opportunity for moderate trade union reform, and the unions would face much harsher medicine when Margaret Thatcher came to power ten years later in 1979.

Questions and Talking Points

1. Why didn't Labour deal with trade union reform in the late 1960s?
2. Why would you expect a Labour government to have more constructive relations with trade unions than a Conservative one?
3. In what ways did the trade unions during the period 1964–1970 damage both the country and the Labour Party?

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21 Andrew Marr, *A History of Modern Britain* (2007), p. 308.
22 David Marquand & Anthony Seldon, *The Ideas that Shaped Post-War Britain* (1996), Ch. 5, p. 104.
23 David Marquand & Anthony Seldon, *The Ideas that Shaped Post-War Britain* (1996), Ch. 5, p. 105.
24 Andrew Marr, *A History of Modern Britain* (2007), p. 309.
25 Jack Straw, *Last Man Standing: Memoirs of a Political Survivor* (2012), Ch. 3, p. 76.

The beginning of the 'Troubles' in Northern Ireland

Britain's involvement in the affairs of Ireland dates back as far as the twelfth century. It developed further in the seventeenth century when approximately 170,000 settlers, mainly Protestants from Scotland, took over much of northern Ulster from *'disloyal'* Catholics and created a Protestant enclave in a predominantly Catholic country. In **1690** the landmark *'Battle of the Boyne'* saw Protestant supporters of William of Orange defeat Catholic forces of James II at an Ulster battle. Orange lodges commemorate this victory on **12th July** every year, often attracting sectarian violence and tension. Ireland officially became part of the UK under the **Act of Union (1800)**.

Partition occurred in 1921 between North and South, the North remaining within the UK, the South gaining *'dominion status'* and then full independence in 1937. Protestants have always outnumbered Catholics in Northern Ireland although there has been significant inter-marriage. Due to Ulster's historic problems, investment has been poor, and this has led to the highest levels of unemployment in the UK. Ulster has a strong agricultural and rural-based economy. Fundamental differences exist between the two communities upon which it is difficult to compromise, especially when community fears are exploited and whipped up by political and religious leaders. Most Protestants wish to remain part of the United Kingdom, while most Catholics seek to be part of an all-Ireland state.

The Northern Ireland issue had come to a head in 1969 when Prime Minister **Harold Wilson** *(left)* sent in troops to both Belfast and Londonderry to restore order following civil rights protests by the minority Catholic community, which claimed it was being oppressed. This year is seen as the start of a period known as ***'The Troubles'***. However, following the emergence of the *Provisional IRA* in 1969 with its commitment to terrorism and violent opposition to British rule, successive British governments have subsequently managed the affairs of the divided Protestant and Catholic communities with great difficulty. Protestants describe themselves as Unionists, while Catholics are referred to as Nationalists.

Key Features of Northern Ireland Politics and Society during 'The Troubles'

- **Adversarial**:
  A style of politics characterised by ideological antagonism and an ongoing electoral battle between major parties.
- **Sectarianism**:
  Concerning a sect or sects. Actions carried out on the grounds of membership of a sect (group), e.g. Protestants/Catholics.
- **Terrorism**:
  The systematic (regular) use of violence and intimidation to achieve political ends.

Glossary of Key Terms – Northern Ireland

- **Unionist/Loyalist** – this term describes the majority of the Protestant community. It is an expression of their loyalty to the Union between Northern Ireland and Britain which they wish to preserve.
- **Republican/Nationalist** – most nationalists support the reunification of Ireland and tend to be Catholic. This would involve the withdrawal of Britain and the dissolution of Northern Ireland. More militant nationalism is expressed in the shape of republicanism, i.e. the campaign for an Irish republic including the North.

Economic problems and loss of 1970 general election

Labour had sought to depict itself as a responsible manager of the nation's finances when criticising Conservative economic failings in the early 1960s, but it faced major financial problems of its own after 1964 within the context of an overall economic downturn. Indeed, the mid-1960s onwards marked the gradual ending of the **'long post-war boom'** that had sustained itself for twenty years or so in the aftermath of war. From the mid-1960s onwards, the British economy would face many major difficulties under governments of different political persuasions. This negative economic trend may explain why Wilson's Government applied for membership of the EEC in 1967, which was again rejected under the influence of Charles de Gaulle of France (as had been the case in an earlier application in 1963).

In November 1967, Wilson's Labour administration was forced to devalue the pound *(sterling)*, amidst difficulties in the international currency markets. Significant splits among senior ministers and between the government and the Bank of England occurred as to whether this was the best course of action to take. Many saw such a step as national humiliation, but the aim of devaluation was to make British exports more competitive abroad and to stimulate ailing British industry.

As a result of devaluation, there commenced an economic crisis and the resignation of Chancellor **James Callaghan** *(left)* on a *'point of honour'* after earlier declaring *'devaluation is not the way out of Britain's difficulties'*. Wilson resisted calls to follow suit, despite him initially denying the likelihood of **devaluation** to the House of Commons. Such resilience was a reflection of Wilson's image as a great political survivor. Cabinet minister Tony Benn described devaluation as *'a great moment of defeat for the government…what we had tried to prevent for three years'*.[26]

Devaluation

When a government lessens or cancels the value of its currency by lowering its value within a fixed exchange rate in relation to other currencies.

Wilson defended his economic policy and claimed that it was not only his government that were to blame for this development as he cited the huge balance of payments deficit of £800 million that he had inherited from the last Conservative administration. He described the accompanying spending cuts as *'an exceptionally ghoulish package of further measures'*. Spending cuts were always difficult for Labour with its tradition of *'tax and spend'*.

By the late 1960s, the economic outlook appeared bleak for Labour and it had become an unpopular government very quickly, divided over spending cuts and trade union reform in particular. Not only had devaluation been seen as something of a national *'humiliation'*, but Wilson was accused of misleading the public by wrongly claiming that such a measure would not affect *'the pound in your pocket'*, as in relation to other currencies it quite clearly would. Some commentators have claimed that this was an early example of political **'spin'** in trying to explain away a major political problem in the most favourable way to the government.

26 Tony Benn, *Out of the Wilderness: Diaries 1963–1967* (1987), Diary entry Sun 18th November 1967, p. 513.

Callaghan was succeeded as Chancellor by the reforming former Home Secretary Roy Jenkins who pushed through government spending cuts to the tune of £750 million, despite fierce opposition from many left-wing Labour MPs and the trade unions. To make the government even more unpopular, taxes were raised on cigarettes, alcohol and petrol as the 1960s drew to a close. Despite the unpopularity of these measures, they did improve the country's economic position, and by 1969 the balance of payments was now a surplus of almost £400 million.

Key Economic Problems 1964–1970

- Large balance of payments deficit.
- Devaluation of currency (1967).
- Import duties increased.
- Government borrowing money from the IMF (International Monetary Fund).
- Wages held down by government.

Despite these tough measures and some indicators of progress, inflation was creeping upwards and this affected prices and wage demands, with pay restraints ending in 1970. Strikes became more common and unemployment rose from 400,000 in 1964 to over 600,000 by 1970. In many ways, Labour's policies were not that different from the **'stop-go'** approach of the Conservatives. Despite continued growth in living standards with increasing ownership of televisions, refrigerators and other electrical goods, when voters went to the polls in 1970: *'Apathy and disillusion were….. the prevailing mood of Labour supporters'*,[27] and the somewhat unexpected Conservative victory suggested that Labour had failed to provide sufficient answers to tackle Britain's challenging post-war economic problems.

Questions and Talking Points

1. Why did Labour devalue the pound in 1967 and what did the policy hope to achieve?
2. Why did Labour face economic difficulties between 1964 and 1970?
3. Explain whether Labour's economic policies were any different from those of the previous Conservative government.
4. What do you think were the factors in explaining the Conservative election victory in 1970? Prioritise which you think were the most important.
    - Enoch Powell's views on race appealed to many Labour voters.
    - Conservatives had a more modern and representative image compared to 1964.
    - Devaluation of the pound.
    - Jenkins' permissive legislation was unpopular among some social groups.
    - Failure of *'In Place of Strife'* trade union reforms.

[27] Jack Straw, *Last Man Standing: Memoirs of a Political Survivor* (2012), Ch. 3, p. 78.

Revision Exercise: Labour Government 1964–1970

Outline the key successes and failures of the Labour government of 1964–1970.

Policy/ Issue	Successes	Failures
Political		
Economic		
Social		
Cultural		

Exercise: Key Revision Questions 1964–1970

Revision Quiz

1. Name three landmark social reforms passed by the Wilson Government of 1964–1970. **(3)**

.....

.....

.....

2. What impact did popular culture have on British society during the 1960s? **(2)**

.....

.....

3. What economic disaster faced the Labour government in 1967? **(1)**

.....

4. What were the main consequences of the above economic disaster? **(2)**

.....

.....

5. What was the name of the 1969 White Paper aimed at controlling trade union power and which politician proposed it? **(2)**

.....

.....

Total: ..... OUT OF 10

The End of Post-War Consensus (1970–1979)

Heath's Government

Carpenter's son **Edward Heath** *(left)* had succeeded the aristocratic Alec Douglas-Home for the Conservative leadership in 1965. He had, therefore, offered a different image of the Conservative Party as they somewhat surprisingly returned to national power in 1970 after less than six years in opposition, and they *'had not all expected victory…achieved against most predictions'*.[28] With a fairly slender parliamentary majority of 30 and with the slogan ***'Tomorrow will be better than Today'***, the Conservatives won a narrow majority in Parliament with an optimistic message, although Heath's ascent to the top of the Conservative Party was ultimately seen as:

> *A beacon of promise to many of his contemporaries…who saw in him the proof that the age of the meritocracy had dawned. In Britain's class-obsessed society, this was what immediately mattered most about Heath – his humble origins…the proof he embodied that you did not need to be a toff to lead the toffs' party.*[29]

Party	1970	
	MPs	(+/-)
Conservative	330	(+77)
Labour	288	(-76)
Liberal	6	(-6)

Heath certainly represented a new type of Conservative, and those with lower-middle class and relatively ordinary backgrounds were now making significant progress within what appeared to be a more meritocratic party. This trend of 'social mobility' would continue with the leadership of Margaret Thatcher some ten years later, as the Conservatives sought to extend their political appeal to the lower-middle classes and later the skilled working-class voters, with class divisions gradually becoming less apparent and significant.

Society in the 1970s: Education Policy

One of the Heath Government's most notable contributions to education policy was to preside over the raising of the school leaving age from 15 (since 1944) to 16. This proposal had been in the pipeline for much of the 1960s, and it finally came into effect in September 1972. The primary aim of the policy was to create a better educated workforce with an additional year of knowledge and learning behind them, but it did require schools to have to restructure and reorganise their levels of provision.

In addition to this, the ongoing development of comprehensive education was continued from the previous Labour government, with the Heath Government's viewpoint being that they had progressed too far down the comprehensive route for the policy to be suddenly reversed. There was, therefore, no U-turn on this policy and this suggested a further degree of policy consensus, despite the fact that the

28 Hugo Young, *One of Us* (1989), Ch. 6, p. 66.
29 Hugo Young, *One of Us* (1989), Ch. 5, p. 52.

Conservatives had previously opposed the dismantling of the system created by the **1944 Butler Education Act**. One historian summarises this policy situation in the 1970s as follows:

> *Few issues in the 1970s were more divisive than education….. Schools became a battleground not only between working-class ambition and middle-class idealism, but between traditionalist and radicals, old and young, left and right….. The drive to turn Britain's schools comprehensive was not, as is often thought, motivated merely by left-wing egalitarianism.*
>
> *By far the most important factor was the consensus that the existing system, with most children taking the eleven-plus to decide whether they went on to grammar school or a secondary modern, was simply not working. Most grammar schools were excellent, but many secondary moderns were terrible. Since the typical grammar school had three times the resources of the typical secondary modern, success or failure at just 11 could determine a child's entire educational career.'*[30]

Subsequently, even though the concept of comprehensive education was more in tune with Labour ideology, Heath's Government presided over the ongoing transformation of various selective grammar schools into 'catch-all' comprehensives. Somewhat ironically, the Education Secretary presiding over this policy was Margaret Thatcher, who would create more comprehensive schools than any other Education Secretary. This was somewhat ironic given that she was a sterling advocate of grammar schools when prime minister during the 1980s. Another noteworthy act she carried out in this role was the removal of free milk for junior school children in 1971 (which had been in place since 1946 yet was removed to save money). Labour under Wilson had removed free school milk from secondary age pupils in 1968, but this earned her the title of *'Thatcher the milk snatcher'*.

Race and immigration: Ongoing issues

By 1970 there were approximately 1.4 million non-white residents in the UK compared to a few thousand in 1945, and a third had been born in Britain, which seemed to be clear evidence of Britain becoming a multicultural society. Heath's Government sought to respond to growing public concerns by passing the **Immigration Act of 1971,** which further limited the immigration flow from the Commonwealth, with such citizens losing their automatic right to remain in the UK. In practice, this meant they faced the same restrictions as those from other parts of the globe, and would in future only be allowed to remain in Britain after five years of employment.

However, ethnic tensions within the UK were further worsened by events developing in the former colony of Uganda from the early 1970s onwards. In 1972 approximately 60,000 Asians from Uganda were expelled from that country by the dictator Idi Amin, who wanted a predominantly black society. This created a major immigration-related issue for Heath's Conservative administration (particularly its more nationalist MPs) when approximately 30,000 Ugandan Asians turned up in the UK with British passports and nowhere else to go.

The British government's position was that it had a moral obligation to provide refuge for this latest surge of colonial immigrants, but developments in both Rhodesia in the 1960s and now Uganda in the 1970s indicated how the former imperial colonies could still create problems for the British government even when the Empire was much reduced in size, as well as stirring up some racial problems in the process at a time of heightened racial tensions at home (particularly in the wake of the 1968 *'Rivers of Blood'* episode and the rise of far-right politics).

30 Dominic Sandbrook, *Seasons in the Sun: The Battle for Britain, 1974–1979* (2012), Ch. 9. pp. 196–197.

Problems of Northern Ireland

The simmering tensions in Northern Ireland were intensified further in 1970 by the formation of the moderate nationalist Social Democratic and Labour Party (SDLP) which campaigned on a platform of civil rights for Catholics, and the election to Westminster of the controversial Protestant preacher Ian Paisley. To round matters off, the British government's policy of **internment** *(detention without charge)*, introduced by Heath's Government in 1971, seriously antagonised the Catholic population. This policy was seen as a last resort before direct rule, yet it led to Catholics being arrested without charge in disproportionate numbers and an upsurge in violence. Heath was said to have defied the advice of the army in pursuing this policy.

According to one commentator, Britain's role in Northern Ireland led to it alienating both sides of the divided province:

> *Successive British governments had to get used to being hated – to being seen, (by Protestants) on the one hand, as turncoats seeking to force an alien union with Ireland upon its kith and kin, and on the other (by Catholics), as imperialists seeking to prevent that union.*[31]

Britain, for its part, was hardly enamoured with having to deal with this historical problem after almost fifty years of relative calm, evident in the comments below:

> *Reginald Maudling, Conservative Home Secretary 1970–1972 on visiting Northern Ireland:* ***'What a bloody awful place!'***

In March 1972, due to escalating violence between the two communities, Conservative Prime Minister Edward Heath suspended the Northern Ireland Parliament at Stormont and established **'direct rule'** *(government from Westminster)* in a desperate attempt to curb the violence and terrorism within the province. The announcement that Stormont was being suspended after 50 years *'exploded like a political blockbuster on the Irish scene'.*[32]

The introduction of direct rule and the removal of self-rule was seen by unionists *(Protestants)* as a betrayal. The cabinet minister with responsibility for Northern Ireland *(Secretary of State)* effectively became the province's prime minister. Over subsequent years efforts were made to introduce devolved 'power-sharing' between the two communities, particularly with the doomed **Sunningdale Agreement (1973)** but these initiatives fizzled out due to a lack of trust and ongoing violence. There has been broad policy agreement between Labour and Conservative governments on Northern Ireland policy since this turbulent period- the basis of a **bi-partisan (cross-party)** approach to the issue.

Key Questions

1. Explain why the Conservative Party introduced 'direct rule' to Northern Ireland in 1972.
2. Why did early power-sharing initiatives like the Sunningdale Agreement (1973) fail?

31 Stephen J Lee, *Aspects of British Political History 1914–1995* (1996), Ch. 21, p. 333.

32 Andrew Roth, *Heath and the Heathmen* (1972), Ch. 15, p. 233.

Britain's entry into the EEC and relations with Europe

With previous governments having twice had applications rejected, Heath's administration had been in prolonged negotiations to join the European Economic Community (EEC) since taking office in mid-1970. Heath was an ardent pro-European *'who allowed himself some enthusiasm for the European experiment*[33] and his pro-European credentials were formed during his military service as an officer in World War II. It was this prolonged conflict that inspired him to support a political system which involved greater European cooperation, not the potential for further warfare between nations.

Heath had been one of the pro-Europeans who felt that Britain had missed an opportunity by not joining the EEC on its creation in 1957 and that trade and employment had suffered accordingly in a volatile economic system. He genuinely believed that membership of the EEC would tackle the *'stop-go'* economics of recent years under both major parties. However, in the 1950s the prevailing mood had been that Britain remained a strong economic nation that could maintain a more independent economic outlook that was separate from Europe, although the scale of the nation's post-war economic slump had not yet been realised at that stage.

Given his pro-European sentiments, on New Year's Day 1973, Heath formally signed Britain's entry to the EEC *(European Economic Community).* The decision to join was endorsed by a 1975 referendum where people voted 2:1 in favour under Harold Wilson's Labour Government. Britain had previously had its application for membership twice rejected by French President **General Charles de Gaulle** *(left)* in both 1963 and 1967. However, on de Gaulle's retirement in 1969, the opportunity for British membership appeared to be more promising.

However, Heath's Euro-enthusiasm did not align itself with everyone in his party, and this decision to join the EEC would create divisive problems for Conservative governments in later decades. Even in 1974 it caused ructions within the Conservative Party, with Conservative dissident **Enoch Powell** urging people to vote Labour in the first election of that year (February) due to his fears for the UK's national sovereignty and because of Labour's more sceptical position (at the time) to EEC membership.

Heath signed Britain up to join a trading organisation that he hoped would stabilise employment patterns and inflation but over the years its powers and structures evolved into a more transnational organisation with greater political powers and influence. In a positive light, British trade with Europe subsequently increased by 20% in the next twenty years, and despite the controversial nature of this decision, many have viewed it as Heath's most significant and enduring achievement.

33 Keith Robbins, *The World Since 1945* (1998), Ch. 5, p. 162.

The state of the 'special relationship' with the USA

These more concrete links with Europe were particularly significant in the sense that Britain had endured a long period of post-imperial decline and was therefore seeking to reassert and redefine its role in the world. Heath also sought to stabilise relations with the USA by improving the tensions over the conflict in Vietnam that had existed under Wilson.

He also sought to offer ongoing British support to the Americans in terms of the Cold War with the Soviet Union, and there was also some potential benefits for Britain stemming from improved American diplomatic links with China from the early 1970s (with trade, scientific and economic opportunities that this entailed). This indicated that the **'special relationship'** was still important to Heath, although some within his party feared that enhanced relations with Europe would undermine it.

Special Relationship

The close diplomatic and political ties between the USA and Great Britain that existed for most of the twentieth century.

Questions and Talking Points

1. Explain why Heath led Britain into the EEC in 1973.
2. What future problems did Heath create for the Conservative Party by this action and when and how did such problems come to fruition?
3. Why had Britain not previously joined the EEC, and how did this impact on links with the USA?

Heath's economic policies

In early 1970, Heath had initiated a fairly radical shadow cabinet policy review at the Selsdon Park Hotel in London. This **Selsdon Conference** heralded an apparent new direction for the Conservatives and implied that there would be a break from the economic *'consensus politics'* of the 'Butskellite' post-war years, with increasing question marks about maintaining the size and cost of the existing post-war welfare state. It was also strongly implied that a more free market and *'liberal'* approach to running the nation's economy would prevail should the Conservatives take power. Harold Wilson subsequently coined the term, ***'Selsdon Man'*** to describe this new Conservative positioning, and to observers this development seemed to confirm *'the party's rightwards movement'*.[34]

Key Economic Problems from 1970 Onwards

- Excessive trade union power.
- Inefficient and bad management.
- Poor levels of investment.
- British industry not producing enough goods at competitive prices.
- Weak Gross Domestic Product (GDP) compared to competitors. (* GDP is the total value of goods and services provided in a country during one year.)

34 B Evans & A Taylor, *From Salisbury to Major: Continuity and Change in Conservative Politics* (1996), Ch. 6, p. 152.

Summary of key economic debate in the 1970s

Post-war economic consensus	'Free market' liberal economics
Relatively high level of public spending	Levels of public spending to be reduced
High levels of employment and government subsidies to key state-owned industries, e.g. coal, steel, etc.	The state to take a reduced role in providing employment, housing and subsidies to industry, opting to rely on the 'free market' instead
Relatively high levels of taxation to fund large public sector and high number of people employed by the state	Taxation to be reduced as a consequence of lower public spending and fewer state employees

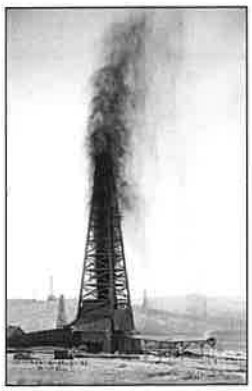
Heath preferred to view himself as someone with a more 'technocratic' or modernising approach, as opposed to being particularly ideological. He, therefore, embraced the need (in theory at least) for new solutions to long-standing problems. In economic matters he appointed **Anthony Barber** as his Chancellor of the Exchequer in the summer of 1970 following the sudden death of the more established politician who had shadowed the role of Chancellor while the party was in opposition, Iain McLeod. This appointment came just weeks after the Conservatives returned to government, and Barber was, therefore, a relatively inexperienced politician to be handed such a key government position and was faced with very challenging economic conditions. Barber's initial measures appeared to be clearly in line with the *'Selsdon'* programme, with taxes being cut and credit and hire purchase restrictions imposed in order to control the supply of money.

There was also an increase in the sale of council houses, which reflected attempts to downsize the scale of the welfare state. There did appear to be some inconsistency in economic policy, however, as these tax and spending cuts were complemented by rate and fuel rebates for poor families along with a *'Family Income Supplement'*. Heath's Government, therefore, certainly appeared to be giving out mixed messages in terms of economic and welfare policy matters, in that it appeared to be talking 'tough' in terms of curbing public spending, but in practical terms was maintaining the bulk of the generous and costly welfare state.

Once in office, Heath initially promised that the high-spending *'years of consensus'* would indeed be challenged and addressed. However, as unemployment started to rise and industrial unrest erupted into large-scale strikes, Heath backtracked and performed a series of **'U-turns'** when he became aware and concerned of the social and electoral implications of his proposed *'free market'* policies with their associated cuts in public spending. Therefore, although he talked about a new economic approach, in many ways his economic policies were not markedly different from Wilson and the *'One Nation'* Macmillan.

This ideological retreat caused resentment among some members of his cabinet and such an about-turn was something that the Thatcherites did not do some ten years later. This reversion to high-spending *'Keynesianism'* caused major ructions within the Conservative Party for years to come and damaged Heath's reputation within his party accordingly.

In some ways, Heath was unfortunate in that his period as prime minister appeared to coincide with the end of what the left-wing historian Eric Hobsbawm described as a post-war *'Golden Age'* of economic growth (1951–1973),[35] with the figures below perhaps supporting this interpretation. The early 1970s were, therefore, difficult years for the British economy, and Heath's long-term economic policy was thrown into turmoil by events between 1973 and 1975 which saw Britain plunged into a recession, a situation sparked by the instability in the Middle East. Following the October 1973 *Yom Kippur War*, the *Organisation of Petroleum Exporting Countries (OPEC)* decided to drastically reduce oil supply, a move which severely disrupted economic output in the West.



Period		% of British labour force unemployed
Pre 'Golden Age'	1921–1938	13.4
'Golden Age'	1950–1969	1.6
Post 'Golden Age'	1970–1993	6.7

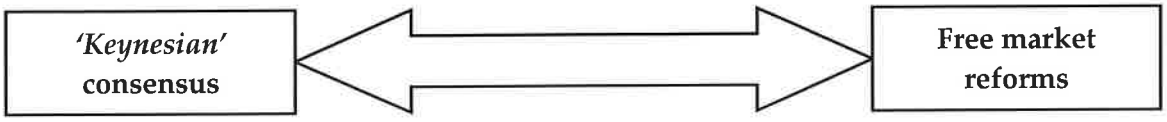
Information source: John Sloman, *Economics* (2004)

The cost of fuel subsequently rocketed *(by up to 400% at its peak)*, oil imports to Britain were slashed and this gave the miners even greater leverage in relation to their control of the coal supply in Britain (which was the main source of the UK's electricity). Heath's response to these economic difficulties and trade union pay demands was to try to impose a **national incomes policy** – the attempted imposition of wages by law (opposed by the unions) – but which ultimately failed and resulted in a 2% fall in Britain's national output along with an increase in inflation.

Heath's attempts to control wages were at odds with his initial free market approach, as was the nationalisation of *Rolls Royce* and the financial support offered to Clyde shipbuilders. Amidst changing economic circumstances, Heath was altering his economic policy. Some would say this was a sign of pragmatism while others attacked him for abandoning his principles. Ultimately he was reverting to a **'stop-go'** approach reminiscent of the 1950s with bouts of government economic intervention followed by a reduction in the state's role.

Further evidence of economic downturn could be seen in a balance of payments deficit of over £900 million by 1973, along with a climb in employment to 850,000, eventually rising to the symbolic one million mark. Opposition leader and former prime minister Harold Wilson taunted Heath over unemployment, *'the reality of the government's attainment of one million unemployed'*.[36] Despite the so-called 'militancy' of some trade union leaders, many industrial workers would claim they were merely seeking enough money for a decent standard of living. Indeed, many of the industrial disputes throughout the 1970s and 1980s caused significant long-term damage to the infrastructure and long-term stability of the mining and industrial communities across the United Kingdom, which many have never recovered from in terms of employment prospects.

Heath's economic dilemma in 1970



35 Eric J Hobsbawm, *The Age of Extremes: The Short Twentieth Century, 1914–1991* (1994).

36 Wilson cited in Andrew Roth, *Heath and the Heathmen* (1972), Ch. 15, p. 230.

Task

A key debate over the years has been whether Heath was a genuine economic reformer or a traditional 'One Nation' Conservative.

- 'One Nation' conservatism believes in a significant welfare state and generous public services, alongside a desire for social harmony between classes, with the wealthier members of society having a duty to assist the poor. It also tends to be more 'internationalist' and cooperative in its economic relations with other nations.
- An 'economic liberal' Conservative would argue for a reduced welfare state with streamlined and reduced public services and lower taxation as a result. They would acknowledge that the 'free market' should have a greater significance than the state in how the economy is run and that such an approach had the potential to lead to economic conflict between groups and classes, e.g. between employers and trade unions. It tends to prioritise national economic interests when dealing with other countries.

On the basis of the above definitions, assess what type of Conservative Edward Heath was based on his performance in office between 1970 and 1974. Was he one type or another or a combination of the two? Please provide reasons for your answer in a few brief paragraphs.

Breakdown of industrial relations in the early 1970s

Following Labour's aborted attempts at trade union reform in the late 1960s, Edward Heath came to power in 1970 promising to bring the unions to heel with his own initiatives as part of a more free-market approach to running the economy. However, excessive pay demands, rising inflation and brewing industrial unrest were key problems facing the incoming Conservative government. However, Heath's ambitious **Industrial Relations Act (1971)** ran into even fiercer hostility than Labour's *'In Place of Strife'* in its attempt to control union wage demands.

Maybe it was his Conservative position in proposing the policy that caused such an industrial furore, but it was still fairly moderate in comparison to Margaret Thatcher's radical proposals of the 1980s. Heath's attempts to control the activity of trade unions via this legislation saw a significant union fight back in terms of strikes and disruption, and 1971 saw more days lost through strikes than in any year since the infamous ***General Strike*** of 1926.

> *Its* (the Industrial Relations Act) *avowed intention of turning trade unions into orderly and responsible bodies organised in a clear command structure conflicted with its libertarian desire to extend worker individualism by abolishing the closed shop and emphasising a worker's right not to join a trade union.*[37]

Harold Wilson on the 1971 Industrial Relations Act:

> *The Government's dedication to the free market led it at first to believe that wages would find their own level as a result of tight monetary control.*[38]

In the aftermath of this doomed policy proposal, Heath was faced with unemployment edging up to one million and in January 1972 a crippling miners' strike, created by a provocative demand for a pay increase of 45%. Critics from both his own party and the Labour opposition claim that Heath performed a major policy U-turn in the face of rising unemployment and backed off from radical economic reforms due to the negative **social consequences**. The *Industrial Relations Act* largely became ignored by both employers and trade unions. Labour leader Harold Wilson dismissed the Conservative industrial approach as follows, claiming that it compared unfavourably to his own time in office:

> *Mr Heath... was dedicated to rationalising the system of industrial relations by placing it under a tight and tidy framework of law. Conservative Ministers... tend to be uninformed on trade union realities... and the loyalties of trade unionism... (in 1971) nearly 24 million man-days were lost, more than all those in the years 1964 to 1969.*[39]

The Three Day Week

By the winter of 1973–1974, the powerful mining unions had organised an overtime ban and further strikes in protest at Heath's attempts to curb wage demands. Coupled with the disruption caused to oil supplies from the Middle East conflict, this led to power cuts, significant strikes and culminated in the infamous ***'three-day week'*** between January and March 1974, when there was only enough energy to power the nation for half of the week. The nation as a whole suffered significant shortages of everyday resources such as fuel and electricity during this period, and for much of the remainder of the decade power shortages were an occasional occurrence.

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37 David Marquand & Anthony Seldon, *The Ideas That Shaped Post-War Britain* (1996), Ch. 5, p .105.

38 Harold Wilson, *Final Term: The Labour Government 1974–1976* (1979), p. 3.

39 Harold Wilson, *Final Term: The Labour Government 1974–1976* (1979), p. 3.

However, for the mining communities at the centre of this dispute there were much harsher shortages in terms of no pay and having to endure a cold winter in such circumstances. The mining communities across the UK felt this was the price they had to pay for their belief that they were underpaid and undervalued within an atmosphere of social division between them and their employers. The mining communities experienced severe social hardships with many families struggling to survive without a regular income while strikes took place. This experience would prepare such communities for further and more sustained industrial unrest in the 1980s. Amidst crippling power cuts and frustration at ongoing trade union hostility to his economic and industrial policies, Heath called a general election in February 1974 on the dramatic issue of ***'Who Governs Britain?'*** – the Conservative Government or the trade unions?

Task

How significant was the miners' industrial action from 1972–1974 in affecting the specific mining communities and the country as a whole? Using information above and your own knowledge, write a brief paragraph on both the local and national aspects of the dispute.

Political instability in the 1970s

The February 1974 election has been described as *'a bitter and dramatic affair'*,[40] with Heath focusing on wage restraint and Labour offering little real alternative other than promising a greater ability to control the trade unions, who appeared to be out of control. The behaviour of some trade unions during this period, notably the NUM *(National Union of Miners)* was not forgotten by several prominent Conservatives including future prime minister Margaret Thatcher. The two very close election results went marginally in Labour's favour, although the first was on a knife-edge and resulted in the first hung Parliament since 1929.

However, Labour ultimately returned to office (following a further general election in October when they obtained a very small majority). Heath was ultimately unable to strike a deal with the Liberals following the February election result, and although the outgoing Prime Minister would not have realised it at the time, *'The Year 1974 encompassed the long-drawn-out death throes of Edward Heath's Conservative Party'*.[41]

Party	MPs	
	1974 (Feb)	1974 (Oct)
Labour	301	319
Conservative	297	277
Liberal	14	13
Others	23	26

Heath had now lost three elections out of four *(1966 and twice in 1974)*, and many in the *'natural party of government'* viewed this as an unacceptable performance and his prospects to continue as Conservative leader, therefore, appeared bleak. In February 1975 he was subsequently defeated as party leader by Margaret Thatcher, who pledged to deliver a new style of Conservative government in the future.

40 Norman Lowe, *Mastering Modern British History* (1989), Ch. 31, p. 622.

41 Hugo Young, *One of Us* (1989), Ch. 7, p. 81.

Quirks of the UK (Westminster) electoral system

- In February 1974, the Conservatives won over 200,000 more votes yet got fewer MPs elected than Labour.
- In the same election, the Liberals almost trebled their national vote yet received only eight extra MPs.

Key Question

Write a summary as to why the 1970s were so economically challenging for Britain.

Some key issues that you may wish to prioritise in importance are as follows:
(There is no right or wrong answer for this task, just rank issues in order and briefly explain why.)

- Ongoing economic dependence on long-term American loans, and, due to the prolonged Vietnam War (1965–1975), the US economy was weakened which resulted in more limited American financial support.
- Global instability such as the Arab-Israeli (Yom Kippur) War of 1973 which saw world oil prices quadruple by the end of 1973, pushing up fuel prices accordingly.
- A shortage of funding/revenue led to an inability to reinvest in Britain's infrastructure, e.g. rail, road and the power network.
- Increased military expenditure and commitments in volatile Northern Ireland.
- Increased economic competition from growing economies in South East Asia and Japan.
- Excessive demands and powers of trade unions resulted in excessive wage demands that were uncompetitive and made many products unprofitable.

Questions and Talking Points

1. Why did Heath fail to resolve Britain's industrial and economic problems in the 1970s?
2. What did the Conservative Party learn from Heath's difficulties in industrial relations?
3. Why was there a lack of consistency in Heath's economic policies?

Historical Interpretations

The 'One Nation' Conservative supporters of Heath's approach to government have subsequently claimed that he was unwilling to sanction extreme cuts in public spending that would have led to higher levels of unemployment and worsening social conditions and standards of living for significant sections of society.

The 'New Right' critics within his own party, led by Sir Keith Joseph and Margaret Thatcher, condemned his 'U-turn' in initially supporting a rejection of the post-war Keynesian consensus, only to then backtrack under public pressure. They viewed his administration as a wasted opportunity to take on the power of the trade unions and to implement radical economic reforms.

Revision Exercise: Conservative Government 1970–1974

Outline the key successes and failures of the Conservative government of 1970–1974.

Policy/ Issue	Successes	Failures
Political		
Economic		
Social		
Cultural		

Exercise: Key Revision Questions 1970–1974

Revision Quiz

1. What name was given to Heath's new type of conservatism in 1970? **(1)**

.....

2. What global influence pushed up oil prices in 1973–1974? **(2)**

.....

.....

3. What term was used to describe the impact and consequence of the power cuts imposed across Britain by industrial action in 1973–1974? **(1)**

.....

4. What long-term impact did Heath's decision to join the EEC have on the Conservative Party over subsequent decades? **(2)**

.....

.....

5. What post-war economic policy did many in the Conservative Party want Heath to abandon? **(2)**

.....

.....

6. Which trade union played a key role in the downfall of Heath's Government, and why was this so? **(2)**

.....

.....

Total: ..... OUT OF 10

Writing Frame: Essay Structure Plan

Question Title

What were the key factors that influenced Britain's attitude to EEC membership between 1957 and 1973?

Introduction (focus on and address the question title)

- *Address the key factors that shaped Britain's attitude to the EEC during this specific period.*
- *What were the competing reasons and factors that influenced Britain's attitude to the EEC during this historical timeframe, and which were most significant?*

	Key arguments for membership and evidence:	Key arguments against and evidence:	**Other viewpoints and information to consider:**
Economic			
Social	Key arguments for membership and evidence:	Key arguments against and evidence:	**Other viewpoints and information to consider:**
Political	Key arguments for membership and evidence:	Key arguments against and evidence:	**Other viewpoints and information to consider:**
International Scene	Key arguments for membership and evidence:	Key arguments against and evidence:	**Other viewpoints and information to consider:**

Conclusion: Focus on the question title and address the issues raised in the main body of the answer, attempting to reach a measured judgment if possible.

- Full analysis and explanation of all above points are required.

Labour Governments of Wilson and Callaghan (1974–1979)

Political background

Given Heath's apparent failure to tackle both Britain's fundamental economic problems and the excessive power of the trade unions, it was left to Harold Wilson, celebrating his fourth election victory in October 1974, to attempt to find a solution on Labour's behalf. The question was whether he would have any more success than during his earlier administration from 1964 to 1970.

Disillusionment with both major parties was evident in both elections in 1974, when there was a significant boost in the levels of support of the minor parties, with the Nationalists gaining seats in Scotland and Wales and the Liberal vote going up by a massive 12% to almost a fifth of the overall vote. The Liberals had ultimately refused to prop up Heath in power after February 1974 and this resulted in Labour's return to office in the second election of 1974 in October, albeit by a tiny parliamentary majority of five seats.

Whether Labour had any bold new ideas or original policies to address the country's economic failings was open to question. They had taken power with a **tiny majority** and had won a far from ringing endorsement from the British public with less than 40% of the national vote. The economic failings of the Labour government from 1964 to 1970 were still fresh in many people's minds and, to some extent, Wilson had won the 1974 elections by default due to Heath's failures. The general sense of doom and gloom that prevailed is perhaps best summarised by one observer remarking that *'the seventies was quite the most disagreeable decade in Britain's post-war history'*,[42] which attached a somewhat bleak image to British society by the mid-1970s.

Falling living standards

As a party, Labour seemed uncertain whether to embrace Keynesianism or to abandon it, and according to one commentator, the administration from 1974 to 1979 *'lost its way'*.[43] From a more Conservative-inclined perspective, the historian Dominic Sandbrook describes this government as entering office overwhelmed by a mood of pessimism, defeatism, and *'weary resignation'*,[44] with few new ideas of how to tackle the country's deep-rooted problems. Like previous Conservative governments, there was too much **'stop-go'** economics and by as early as the end of 1974, there was little evidence that Labour had the answers to effectively deal with Britain's long-term economic and industrial malaise.

Wilson's second administration ultimately came to the conclusion that the post-war economic consensus was no longer working, although it did not necessarily have a clear alternative remedy. Over the next five years people found their living standards continuing to fall under Labour, having previously fallen under the Conservatives in the first part of the decade. This would explain the loss of electoral support for Britain's two main political parties, and the increased vote for the Liberals and other smaller parties in 1974. The period of steady post-war growth, therefore, seemed to be coming to an end, and this would result in a radical alternative set of policies being proposed by the Conservative Party by 1979.

42 Jack Straw, *Last Man Standing: Memoirs of a Political Survivor* (2012), Ch. 4, p. 91.
43 Stephen J Lee, *Aspects of British Political History 1914–1995* (1996), Ch. 16, p. 248.
44 Dominic Sandbrook, *Seasons in the Sun: The Battle for Britain, 1974–1979* (2012), Ch. 8. p. 171.

Once back in office after 1974, Wilson was faced with a major dilemma on the issue of Europe. Labour had been divided on the issue of joining the European Community and in the parliamentary vote to endorse Heath's negotiations in October 1971, 69 pro-European Labour MPs led by Roy Jenkins had defied a **three-line whip** to vote *'yes'* to membership. This contributed to a 112 majority to endorse joining the EEC and defied the official party line that was against membership.

Three-Line Whip

This is an instruction issued to MPs in Parliament that demands that all MPs of a particular party must abide by the party 'whip' and vote for a specific law or proposal. Its name derives from the fact that its importance is emphasised due to it being underlined three times.

Labour's official position at the 1974 election was to oppose EEC membership, so once in power following Heath's negotiations to join the European Community, Wilson was in a corner in terms of how to take the debate forward and keep his party together. Wilson decided to call a referendum on the matter in order to endorse or reject Heath's decision, an unusual device rarely used by governments but a device which Wilson used in order to deal with a complex problem.

British Referendum – 5th June 1975

'The government have announced the results of re-negotiation of the UK's terms of membership of the European community. ***Do you think that the UK should remain in the EEC?'***

YES	
NO	

A special Labour conference was held in April 1975 and recommended a *'no'* vote to the referendum. However, Wilson was a renowned political fixer and he took the unusual step of abandoning a party line on the issue and allowing his ministers and MPs to campaign for whichever option they wanted. Although Wilson supported membership, many critics accused him of abandoning national leadership on the matter.

With opinions running high within the Labour Party on both sides of the EEC debate, the historic convention of **'collective responsibility'** was temporarily abandoned in the name of keeping the Labour Party reasonably united. Cabinet minister was pitted against cabinet minister in public debate – a most unusual event within British politics.

When the vote took place in June 1975, the British public voted to join the EEC by a margin of approximately two-to-one and endorsed the convincing vote of the House of Commons (396:170) which had convincingly supported Britain's membership under Wilson's slightly amended terms. The result would cause problems for both parties in the years to come, with Labour continuing to be split and becoming more sceptical in the subsequent years. This stance would be a factor in the party's damaging split and the formation of the breakaway Social Democratic Party (SDP) in 1981.

For the Conservatives, many of its MPs supported the 1975 referendum 'yes' campaign in the belief that the European Community was essentially a trading bloc. When it became apparent to some Conservatives that the EC had potential as a political body with powers that threatened national British **sovereignty**, they would review their opinion of this issue in later years, most notably the party's new leader from 1975, Margaret Thatcher, (who voted 'yes' in this referendum). Despite Thatcher's endorsement of the mainstream European position, in future years she would challenge the mainstream and conventional position on many other social and economic issues, heralding an end to the 'years of consensus'.

Sovereignty

Supreme authority within a territory.

Questions and Talking Points

1. Why did Wilson call a referendum about Britain's membership of the EEC?
2. Did Wilson deal effectively with Labour's divisions over the EEC?
3. Did the 1975 referendum on Europe resolve the issue once and for all in British politics? Explain the reasons for your answer.

Callaghan succeeds Wilson (1976)

In April 1976 Harold Wilson, after establishing himself as Labour's most electorally successful leader ever, resigned due to ill health and to make way for *'a younger man'*, having just turned 60. He was succeeded by Foreign Secretary **James Callaghan** *(right)*, a man actually four years Wilson's senior! Wilson's health had been failing and in later years he claimed that the security services had been seeking to undermine his premiership. Callaghan inherited a government that faced a series of major political, economic and industrial crises, so it was quite a challenge facing an experienced politician who had now held all of the key offices of state.

Comparison between Wilson and Callaghan

Wilson	Callaghan
Traditionally from the left-wing of the Labour Party, although had gradually become more pragmatic.	Traditionally from the more moderate wing of the Labour Party.
Had a reputation for being a 'fixer' who sought to kept the divided wings of the Labour Party together.	Vastly experienced and had held all other 'great offices of state' before becoming PM in 1976. Had previously been Home Secretary, Foreign Secretary and Chancellor of the Exchequer (*was older than Wilson).
Won four out of five general elections between 1964 and 1974, making him the most successful ever Labour leader in this respect. Retired under rumour of ill health caused by the strains of the job.	Inherited the role of prime minister in mid-term, and faced some major problems and crises which limited his prospects of being re-elected in his own right. Was, nevertheless, often referred to as 'Sunny Jim' due to his optimistic public comments.

Callaghan was by now a familiar and reassuring figure in Britain, tall, ruddy, no-nonsense, robust, and by comparison with Wilson, straightforward.
(Source: Andrew Marr, *A History of Modern Britain* (2007), p. 363)

Social policy – education

The administrations of Wilson and Callaghan between 1974 and 1979 were ultimately preoccupied with economic management and industrial unrest. However, there was time for a notable piece of social legislation – the **1976 Education Act.** The comprehensive revolution was accelerated under this legislation as a means to remove the perceived social inequalities that were said to exist (according to left-wing politicians) due to the division between grammar and other secondary schools. This was the final stage of a concerted attempt to overhaul the legacy of the 1944 Butler Act, yet Crosland was no longer driving this policy, instead the figurehead behind this further raft of comprehensive education was Education Secretary **Shirley Williams.**

By 1979, only 5% of the UK's school children were educated in grammar schools (down from 25% in 1965), and the Conservative opposition pledged to protect what was left of the grammar system, as well as give schools more freedoms from state control if returned to power in 1979. In terms of university education, by the end of this decade an increased figure of 14% of school-leavers went into higher education, which represented a growth of 10% since the early 1960s (although still dominated by the middle classes).

Medical advances in the 1970s

Since its formal creation in 1948, the National Health Service had been responsible for a huge and growing slice of government spending, based on its fundamental premise of being 'free at the point of need'. In the subsequent years its expansion of new services, new technology and medical advances (such as improved provision of key treatments and vaccines) had been extensive and significant. The NHS had, therefore, expanded considerably in its size and scope, as had the levels of government planning and state control connected to its functions.

Accordingly, the NHS came to take up a growing amount of national GDP (up to 5% by the mid-1970s, compared to only 2% in the 1950s). In many ways it was a victim of its own success in terms of improving people's healthcare and ensuring increased life expectancy for British citizens. Average life expectancy had increased from approximately 60 in the 1930s and by the early 1970s was 68 for men and 72 for women (and was continuing to rise), with significant government health spending largely responsible for such trends.

Consequently, by the middle of this challenging decade and amidst a growing economic crisis, governments of all parties were becoming increasingly aware of the need to control and curb levels of spending on it, due to fears that its long-term funding was not secure within such difficult economic times. This led to consideration of alternative and more innovative means of providing healthcare to a growing and ageing population, with an increased awareness that the centralised state did perhaps not have all of the answers. NHS reform would become increasingly apparent as an issue during the 1980s.

The birth of environmentalism

It was during the 1970s that the first significant stirrings emerged in the UK of a movement that sought to address and focus on the importance of preserving the world's natural environment. Of global origins, the *'green movement'* made its first notable appearance in this decade, promoting an alternative viewpoint to the industrialisation and pollution that had been steadily scarring the earth's atmosphere for much of the twentieth century, particularly evident in the industrialised landscape of some key parts of Britain. With car ownership now approaching 50% of UK households by the mid-1970s, along with a rapid increase in air travel, such transport trends were viewed as a significant and growing concern with respect to pollution from petrol/fuel fumes in particular.

Approximate UK households with car	
Early 1950s	15%
Late 1960s	40%
Mid-1970s	50%

Source: http://www.racfoundation.org/

The first concrete political development of this viewpoint in the UK was the Ecology Party (later the Green Party) that emerged in the mid-1970s, and this decade saw the first World Climate Conference take place in Geneva in 1979. It would be from the late 1980s onwards, however, that environmentalism and 'green politics' would progress to make a much greater impact on British politics and everyday life, with the media, the general public and politicians all becoming much more aware of it as an important political issue. Indeed, its somewhat low-key origins in this decade would disguise the fact that, in later years, it would go on to form a powerful social movement that would engage ordinary people and affect everyday life. However, environmental matters continued to take a back seat to the harsh realities of economic and industrial policies during this period.

Key Question

Why were political parties not as focused on environmental issues in the 1970s as they would be in later years?

Feminism during the 1970s

Having been liberated to a significant degree by Roy Jenkins' liberal reforms of the late 1960s affecting divorce and abortion in particular, the demands of women for greater equality were further boosted in this decade. Women began to take on more and more jobs that were traditionally held by men, and the greater social and sexual freedoms of the 1960s had now allowed them to enthusiastically embrace popular culture. This was particularly evident with improved social lives and leisure opportunities that allowed younger women, in particular, to embrace and enjoy the spread of the 'disco dance' culture of the 1970s – which had replaced and transcended the rock'n'roll era of the 1960s.

This represented development of the feminist movement into its so-called **'second wave'**, and which in turn was more radical in its demands for improved equality. **The Women's Liberation Movement (WLA)** was an international pressure group that emerged from the USA in the 1960s and its members often engaged in direct action and more militant protest to highlight gender inequality. In doing so, it sought to more forcefully change traditional conceptions about the role of women and the ongoing inequality they faced within Western society.

Examples of such protests occurred in the USA when WLA activists protested and sought to disrupt what they believed were sexist and exploitative beauty pageants. Some were critical of such direct action methods, including both fellow feminists and socially conservative males. Prominent feminist influences over this new movement include the American Betty Friedan and the Australian Germaine Greer (*right*); the latter's 1970 book *'The Female Eunuch'* is seen as a key influence over this further wave of feminism.

The WLA became established in Britain following its first conference in the country in 1970, and held further conferences throughout the decade. 'Women's issues', therefore, became far more present within British politics and across wider society, e.g. there was an upsurge in educational courses covering 'Women's Studies'. There was also ongoing socio-economic progress for the feminist cause that can be linked to such ongoing pressure and agitation. **The Equal Pay Act** had been passed into law in 1970 (and was eventually implemented at the end of 1975). Its key purpose was to eliminate discrimination and variations in pay between men and women, which remained an ongoing cause of concern for feminist campaigners.

Feminist movements such as the WLA ultimately sought to overcome deep-rooted cultural issues and traditions which saw some organisations (notably the civil service) not employing married women due to a conservative belief that such women should have a primary domestic role. The emergence of prominent female politicians during this decade such as Labour's Barbara Castle and Margaret Thatcher of the Conservatives would further enhance the professional image of women holding down key positions of responsibility.

- For further information on the battle for equal pay, a good film to watch is *Made in Dagenham* (2010), which focuses on the efforts of female Ford car workers to ensure equal pay and conditions with their male counterparts during the late 1960s / early 1970s. As a prominent female cabinet minister of the period, Barbara Castle, in particular, played a key role in supporting their eventually successful campaign.

The Sex Discrimination Act 1975 (SDA) was a further key piece of legislation that made it unlawful to discriminate on grounds of sex or marital status in recruitment, promotion and training (for employment purposes). Since their efforts during the war, women had worked in increasing numbers but were still often viewed by employers as cheap labour. Such legislation of the 1970s, therefore, marked a significant further step in the drive towards greater equality for women over the course of the twentieth century. Women were subsequently more free and equal in terms of employment rights, while in social lifestyle terms, sex before marriage and abortions became more frequent occurrences and less of a social stigma. The conservative right, however, viewed such developments with some disapproval, viewing such feminist activities as unnecessary 'political correctness', and highlighting what they believed was the lack of morality created by such 'permissive' social policies.

Questions and Talking Points

1. Why did 'feminism' continue to be a prominent issue within British society during the 1970s?
2. Assess the different types of campaigning methods used by feminist activists during this period. How successful were the differing approaches?
3. What criticisms were there of feminist activities during this period?

Racial divisions and immigration in the 1970s

Race relations continued to be a troubled feature of British society during the 1970s, with inter-community tensions continuing to come under strain. The post-war immigration had changed many industrial and urban areas irrevocably, with many established white families moving away from the inner cities towards the suburbs as part of the so-called 'white flight'.

In order to address such tension and to deal with ongoing racial discrimination against non-white citizens, in 1976 the Labour government introduced a new **Race Relations Act** which consolidated and strengthened the previous similar laws from 1965 and 1968. At the same time, there was evidence of an ongoing toughening up of immigration regulations into the country, and by 1979 all prospective immigrants had to have guaranteed employment before being allowed to live and work in the UK. However, there was a notable growth in emigration during this decade, as many British citizens sought to depart from the difficult economic conditions within the country, with Australia a popular destination.

Despite such emigration patterns offering some counter-balance to long-term post-war immigration trends, racial tensions remained visible. This was evident in the emergence of various race-related political groups and activists. A prominent example of this was the **Anti-Nazi League**, a left-wing socialist group that was formed in 1977 in response to the rise of the right-wing **National Front (NF)**, which had been formed in 1967 in protest at rising immigration. However, the NF had notably grown in strength and membership during the 1970s, and it polled almost 200,000 votes at the 1979 general election, largely in areas with high levels of immigration. There were often violent clashes and skirmishes between the NF and the Anti-Nazi League, which added a further layer of unrest to an already unstable and fractious British society.

Youth and musical culture

By the 1970s, the 'mods and rockers' of the 1960s had evolved into 'punks', 'hippies' and 'skinheads'. These various groupings were the latest incarnations of youth culture and reflections of rebellious behaviour among the younger members of society. With unusual appearances and fashions that often had an anti-social and hostile image to older and more 'respectable' citizens, this youth culture was the best way of challenging British tradition and order, and it was also reflected in popular music.

Prominent bands of this era, such as the anarchic *Sex Pistols* (formed in 1975), symbolised the working-class background and anti-establishment popular culture of many drawn to the 'punk' lifestyle. However, while the Sex Pistols and their lead singer 'Johnny Rotten' were mostly advocates of lawless 'Anarchy in the UK', (which was the title of one of their most high-profile songs in 1977), other forms of music took on a more explicit and serious political nature. 'Skinhead' rock music culture, in particular, seemed to be drawn towards the politics of the extreme nationalist right (often linked to contemporary immigration issues), and some punks were drawn to this message also.

In response to such cultural and musical trends, the political left sought to react and organise and the group *Rock Against Racism* was formed in the summer of 1976, and which went on to become the **Anti-Nazi League** in 1977. Led by punk bands such as *The Clash*, alongside a revival of black music and culture as evident in other emerging groups (featuring second-generation immigrants) like *The Specials* and *UB40*. Ultimately, such *'music was popular enough among white youths... to have a real influence in turning the fashion in street culture decisively against racism.'*[45] A clearer link between politics, popular culture and music could not have been more evident, and this reflected some of the most significant social developments affecting Britain during this decade.

Questions and Talking Points

1. Summarise and explain how music, popular culture and politics combined during the 1970s.
2. What was the link between the issue of immigration and the emergence of 'political music' during this decade?

Economic, welfare and industrial crisis (1976–1979)

Some historians and political opponents, such as Margaret Thatcher and Keith Joseph, alternatively argued that Wilson resigned because he realised he had no answer to Britain's economic problems, and it is certainly true that Callaghan inherited a dire economic situation. In his favour, it has been noted that *'Callaghan entered No. 10 with a great deal of baggage in terms of both political conviction and ministerial experience. He needed every ounce of it'*,[46] such were the extreme challenges that he faced. By the mid-1970s Britain was experiencing an economic condition known as **stagflation**, *'a combination of inflation and stagnation'*.[47] Inflation was rising and peaked at **26%** in 1976 and wage demands could not possibly keep up with such a trend. Interest rates were also high as a means of keeping inflation down but this made limited impact, and the living standards of ordinary people continued to suffer. The trade unions were, therefore, growing more restless, particularly as the government was also increasing taxation to balance the books and meet high levels of public spending which approached 50% of GDP.

45 Andrew Marr, *A History of Modern Britain* (2007), p. 362.
46 Peter Hennessy, *The Prime Minister: The Office and its Holders since 1945* (2000), Ch. 15, p. 378.
47 Denis Healey, *The Time of My Life* (1989), Ch. 18, p. 381.

At the Labour Party Conference in the autumn of 1976, Callaghan made a much-publicised speech in which he stated that the post-war levels of Keynesian public spending in supporting a generous welfare state (featuring an ever-growing NHS) were no longer viable. Callaghan's comments (below) summarised the situation fairly clearly:

> *We used to think that you could spend your way out of a recession and increase employment by cutting taxes and boosting government spending. I tell you in all candour that that option no longer exists.*

Despite early indicators that public spending cuts would, therefore, have to be quickly implemented, one of his first major economic challenges resulted in what some people believe to be a national humiliation. As part of this acknowledged need to cut public spending, Callaghan's Chancellor, **Denis Healey**, sought a substantial loan of $3,900 million in December 1976 from the **IMF** *(International Monetary Fund)* in order to effectively keep the British economy running, following months of financial negotiations with this global body. Significant public spending cuts followed, and political history indicated that this was never a popular option for a Labour Chancellor. Such actions ultimately gave the impression that Britain as a nation was bankrupt, and Healey has recalled the major challenges that he faced at this time:

> *I had to negotiate on two main fronts – to persuade the IMF to accept the smallest possible package of spending cuts, and to persuade the Cabinet to accept that package.*[48]

Key Question

What does the above quote suggest about the economic restrictions and limitations faced by Chancellor Healey in the mid-1970s? Summarise your response in a few paragraphs.

The IMF crisis has been seen as *'the low point of the Government's struggle with the economy'*.[49] To exacerbate matters further, Callaghan gave the impression of being out of touch with this sense of national turmoil when he returned from abroad during the ***'Winter of Discontent'*** (1978/1979), a period of concerted trade union industrial action which many viewed as a direct consequence of the IMF episode. Appearing somewhat indifferent to the industrial chaos, Callaghan's manner prompted the press headline of *'Crisis, What Crisis?'* which although was apparently never said by Callaghan, appeared to reflect how much of the media perceived his attitude at the time and which damaged his image and political reputation in the process.

48 Denis Healey, *The Time of My Life* (1989), Ch. 20, pp. 429–430.

49 Alan Sked & Chris Cook, *Post War Britain: A Political History* (4th ed., 1993), Ch. 12, p. 315.

Breakdown of industrial relations in the late 1970s

Both Wilson and Callaghan believed they could deal with the excessive trade union pay demands and industrial action that Heath had been unable to resolve. In 1974, Labour had highlighted its links with the unions to persuade the public that it could bring the unions under control. However, the soaring inflation made it difficult to control both pay demands and the threat of strike action.

Callaghan sought a solution in July 1975 via the **'Social Contract'** where in return for trade unions moderating their often excessive wage demands, his Government would repeal the 1971 **Industrial Relations Act** along with food and rent subsidies for union members. This **corporatist** agreement between the government and the TUC *(Trades Union Congress)* seemed to have some potential, but by the late 1970s the deal was under severe pressure, with many government critics believing that the large trade unions and their leaders had too much power and influence within government. The cosiness of this relationship led to the media claim that such government-union relations were conducted amidst an environment of *'beer and sandwiches'*.

> ***Corporatist***
>
> A model of government where external agencies and bodies are involved in key political decisions.

By early 1977, Labour's fragile parliamentary majority was reduced to just one, so a pact with the Liberals was organised *(the Lib-Lab Pact)* to maintain a more secure grip on power, allowing the Liberals *'to veto Cabinet legislative proposals prior to their introduction in the Commons'*.[50] By-election losses in *Walsall, Workington and Birmingham* had contributed to this precarious situation, as did the doomed attempts amidst internal opposition to push a devolution bill through Parliament.

This non-existent majority certainly created a fundamental weakness to Labour's position throughout this unstable period. However, Labour's grip on power was further weakened by trade union activity during the winter of 1978/1979 which became known as the ***'Winter of Discontent'***, which featured sustained strike action in key industries and caused massive disruption to the country's ability to function. Like Heath, Callaghan could not control the wage demands of the unions, who were upset at rising living costs, government spending cuts and rising unemployment which approached 1.5 million in 1977.

The political impact of this was that when Callaghan finally called an election in March 1979, Labour's position was extremely weak. They had been defeated on a motion of *'no confidence'*, the first time the government had lost such a vote since 1924. This meant that they had to call an election at this point and not at a time of their choosing. They were also damaged by their association with the out-of-control trade unions and many voters were in the mood for a radical change of government as offered by the Conservatives under Margaret Thatcher. Callaghan was criticised for not calling an election in autumn 1978 when polls looked more favourable and the worst of the union unrest had yet to occur. Many accused him of underestimating the potential of the relatively new Conservative leader, Thatcher. A useful analysis of the main reasons for Labour's downfall was offered by former Prime Minister Harold Wilson:

> *It was the pay issue and the turbulence of winter of 1978/79 which, it can now be seen in retrospect, caused the downfall of the government... The Unions...moving into militancy, took to the streets. Garbage piled up and rotted in the streets...picketing and closure of schools, and...action preventing the burial of the dead, affronted the nation...James Callaghan strove to avoid an election held in the shadow of the garbage heaps.* [51]

50 Alan Sked & Chris Cook, *Post War Britain: A Political History* (4th ed., 1993), Ch. 12, p. 313.

51 Harold Wilson, *Final Term: The Labour Government 1974–1976* (1979), Epilogue, p. 241.

Somewhat ironically, it has been noted that although Britain was in recession in 1977–1978, economic conditions were improving and the national balance of payments was starting to be boosted by North Sea oil profits, a source of income that would benefit the subsequent Conservative government significantly. However, when the election came it was all too late to save Labour, and was not at their choice in terms of timing. This was within the shadow of ongoing party divisions, a lack of a parliamentary majority and sustained violence in Northern Ireland. Labour's tough response to dealing with the Irish situation, and particularly the terrorist threat to mainland Britain, ultimately led to some nationalist MPs from the province refusing to support Callaghan's government any longer.

Prime Minister Callaghan argued that in 1979 Labour's vote actually improved since 1974, but claimed that *'tempted by promises of lower taxation and with memories of the winter, the abstaining Tories of 1974 had flocked back to their party's colours and gave Mrs Thatcher a large majority of seats'*.[52] Many commentators had argued that Britain was becoming *'ungovernable'*, locked into a cycle of industrial decline and trade union militancy, a decline described as *'social and political and in Britain… deep-rooted'*.[53]

Many on the right of politics argued that Keynesianism had served its purpose and that new ideas and approaches were urgently needed, despite the success of post-war governments in closing the gap between rich and poor. It would be up to Margaret Thatcher from 1979 onwards to attempt to disprove this theory of national decline with her own radical and original solutions to Britain's various problems. In taking this approach she would attempt to fundamentally address the relationship between the state and the citizen, which she argued was skewed too much in favour of the state over individual citizens' rights.

Historical Interpretations

The cuts imposed by Callaghan and his Chancellor Healey were broadly agreed with by the moderate centre of all the main political parties and public opinion to be the required answer to dealing with Britain's growing economic problems, notably the surge in inflation and rising levels of unsustainable public spending. As a response to the IMF loan in 1976, this viewpoint, therefore, appeared to fundamentally reject the Keynesian economic solution.

The left of the Labour Party, e.g. Tony Benn, along with some left-wing historians and militant trade unionists, alternatively argued at the time and subsequently that such spending cuts would adversely affect the poorer members of society and damage public services. They maintained that high levels of tax and spending should be maintained to stimulate consumer spending and overall economic recovery (in line with the Keynesian post-war consensus).

Questions and Talking Points

1. What factors made Labour unable to control the trade unions between 1974 and 1979?
2. Analyse whether trade unions are more cooperative with Labour or Conservative governments. Why have they caused disruption for both parties?
3. In what ways did trade union activity between 1974 and 1979 hasten the arrival of a Conservative government?

52 James Callaghan, *Time and Chance* (1987), Ch. 13, p. 564.

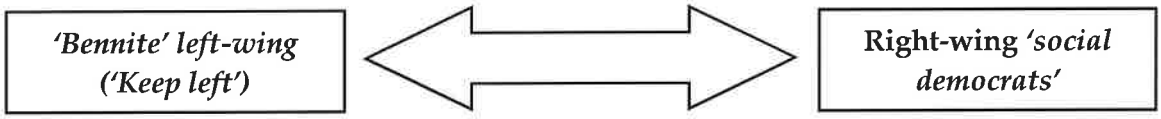
53 Peter Jenkins, *The Anatomy of Decline* (1995), Ch. 3, p.102.

Summary: Labour and Conservative governments and trade unions in the 1960s and 1970s

Summary of the main reasons why both Labour and Conservative governments had difficulties with the trade unions in the 1960s and 1970s.
1. Trade unions had significant powers to organise and take industrial action
2. Trade unions were ideologically hostile to Conservative governments
3. Trade unions expected more in terms of favourable policies and political influence from Labour governments
4. Trade unions appeared to have grown too powerful due to a large membership and funds
5. Some trade union leaders had politically extreme views and deliberately sought to destabilise elected governments during this period

Now try to develop the key points above in a series of paragraphs, similar to the way you would develop the key arguments of an essay.

Labour's divisions in the late 1970s



Labour's splits over Europe in 1975 were a warning shot of things to come. The party appeared to be significantly divided between the radical left, led by **Tony Benn** and opposed to Europe and demanding more nationalisation, public spending and state intervention, and the moderate right-wing, led by **Roy Jenkins,** a group that were pro-European and more willing to accept capitalist market forces within the economy. Such simmering division destabilised the 1974–1979 government and was a key factor in Labour's subsequent years in the political wilderness.

Key Summary: Why did the Conservatives come to power in 1979?

By 1979, the political agenda was moving in the direction of the Conservatives, with British society increasingly disenchanted by ongoing industrial and economic unrest. Issues that the Conservatives were traditionally stronger on were, therefore, viewed as more significant and appealing by much of the wider population:

- *Inflation and taxation were seen as excessive by much of the population.*
- *Unemployment had not been tackled despite high public spending and stood at over one million.*
- *Labour was increasingly divided and had displayed a poor economic record, having sought loans from the IMF in 1976.*
- *There was a general desire among public for change of government – Labour was split and appeared devoid of ideas to tackle the country's economic problems.*
- *Margaret Thatcher promised radical new policies and an end to the somewhat discredited 'years of consensus'.*
- *Trade union power was seen as excessive following the 'Winter of Discontent' – Labour was damaged by its association with the unions and the Conservatives pledged to tackle this issue.*
- *Crime and disorder appeared to be on the increase due to 'liberal' law and order policies since the late 1960s.*

Questions and Talking Points

1. Why did Labour face divisions by the end of the 1970s and early 1980s?
2. Summarise why Conservative policies appealed to key parts of the British public in 1979.

Revision Exercise: 1974–1979

Outline the key successes and failures of the Labour government of 1974–1979.

Policy/ Issue	Successes	Failures
Political		
Economic		
Social		
Cultural		

Exercise: Key Revision Questions 1974–1979

Revision Quiz

1. What was the name of Callaghan's policy for dealing with the trade unions from 1976 onwards? **(2)**

.....

.....

2. Margaret Thatcher's policies from the late 1970s onwards marked the end of a period known as *'The Years of…'* **(1)**

.....

3. How did women's rights improve during the 1970s? **(2)**

.....

.....

4. What was the period of industrial unrest of the winter of 1978–1979 also known as? **(2)**

.....

.....

5. Outline the main reasons why Labour lost the 1979 general election.

.....**(1)**

.....**(1)**

.....**(1)**

Total: ..... OUT OF 10

Discussion Points

1. Did government intervention in the economy do more good than harm during the period 1970–1979? (Provide reasons for your answer.)
2. What factors were significant in Heath winning power in 1970?
3. Did the Heath Government (1970–1974) succeed in economic and industrial matters where the previous Wilson Government had failed?
4. What evidence was there that the 1970s witnessed the end of the sustained 'post-war boom'?
5. Why did the governments of this decade have difficulties in controlling the powers of trade unions?
6. What was the impact of the industrial unrest of this period on both the economy and on the communities within wider British society?
7. What factors led to Britain finally joining the EEC in 1973?
8. Could Britain still be considered an 'imperial power' during this historical period? (Provide reasons for your answer.)

Answers and Feedback

'The Affluent Society' (1951–1964)

Task

What were the consequences of the Suez Crisis of 1956 for both Britain and for Anthony Eden?	
1.	National humiliation to smaller nation, e.g. Egypt
2.	Reflected the balance of the new world order with USA leading the way, and temporarily damaged relations with USA
3.	Clear evidence of decline of the British Empire
4.	Eden stood down as British prime minister with his political career in ruins
5.	Britain lost its power base in the strategically important Middle East

Exercise: Model Essay Task

Evidence of 'consensus'	Evidence of distinct policies
• High levels of public spending on key public services by both parties ('Butskellism') • Maintenance of Labour's nationalisation and welfare policies after 1945 (mixed economy) • General continuing retreat from Empire and broadly relaxed immigration policies, as well as high levels of Cold War defence spending • Levels of taxation remained relatively high • Role of the state was still significant and interventionist	• Conservatives rolled back some aspects of nationalisation • Under the Conservatives there was a deregulation and relaxation of wartime rationing, controls and restrictions • The Conservatives placed a greater focus on private business and industry, e.g. in house building • There was less economic planning under the Conservatives than under Labour, and a significant growth in prosperity and 'consumerism' • Conservatives were inclined to retain a more nationalistic and patriotic policy regarding the Empire and former colonies, e.g. Suez (1956), and by the early 1960s had gradually toughened up their immigration policy

Key Questions

Feedback Summary

1. Opposition politicians disagreed with Macmillan's economic analysis, and while acknowledging some natural post-war improvement as war became more distant, Labour argued that the Conservatives had delivered a false dawn of economic recovery and proclaimed that the Conservative years in office up to 1964 were 'thirteen wasted years', and had failed to deliver both economic and social progress. There was particular criticism on economic matters that too much money was spent on defence under Macmillan during an ostensible period of peace.

2. Macmillan's attitude toward society was that of a privileged member of society who felt a duty and obligation to help the poorer members of society, based on Conservative 'One Nation' principles. Such an outlook did not accept the likelihood of social equality between the classes, but recognised a responsibility among the upper classes to care for the poor, using state intervention to do so where necessary.

Exercise: Model Essay Plan

To what extent can the period 1951–1964 be accurately described as 'thirteen wasted years'?

***Introduction** (focus on and address the question title)*

- *Where is the quote from? What other historical explanations are there?*
  Labour leader Harold Wilson said this as part of his 1964 election campaign.
- *What areas and policy examples could be considered in order to assess the argument?* ***(see below)***

	Key arguments in favour and evidence:	**Key arguments against and evidence:**	**Historical interpretations to consider:**
Economic	UK economic growth was slow during the 1950s and 1960s, notably in relation to other European countries within the EEC. 'Stop-go' economics suggested a lack of planning and direction by the Conservatives.	The period witnessed overall economic growth as part of the general post-war recovery, along with ongoing investment in key public service such as welfare provision and the NHS.	Historian Eric Hobsbawm described this period as part of a post-war 'Golden Age' of economic growth.
Social	Despite the introduction of the NHS in the late 1940s, poor housing, ongoing poverty and rising unemployment by the late 1950s meant that social conditions remained poor for much of the population.	Living standards increased for the majority of the population in this period. Huge increase in the sale of consumer goods such as televisions, radios, fridges, etc. Also improvements to welfare provision and education.	Conservative Prime Minister Harold Macmillan said that people had *'never had it so good'* in terms of improved lifestyles and social conditions.
Political	There was a lack of political direction and investment in key public services. Economic growth was hindered by 'stop-go' economics – this was evident in the economic downturn of the early 1960s.	The Conservatives won three successive general elections in the 1950s, which suggested that there was broad satisfaction with Conservative policies and management of the economy that led to the delivery of generally improved living standards.	Labour's Harold Wilson described this period as *'Thirteen wasted years'* in terms of lack of political achievements and long-term planning.

Conclusion: Focus on the question title and address the issues raised in the main body of the answer, attempting to reach a measured judgment if possible as to whether the period generally had more positives or negatives in the context of Harold Wilson's quote.

Revision Exercise: Conservative Government 1951–1964

Outline the key successes and failures of the Conservative governments of 1951–1964

Key Successes:

- Presided over economic growth and decrease in post-war austerity (economic)
- Maintained and developed the welfare state (social and economic)
- Had some strong leaders and politicians, e.g. Churchill, Butler, Macmillan that maintained a strong influence for Britain in both domestic and foreign affairs, e.g. Cold War (political)
- Presided over a significant growth in living standards (social and economic)
- Won three successive elections reflecting general popularity (political)
- Presided over a period of cultural post-war change in terms of changing and more positive roles for women, alongside greater racial integration (cultural)
- Cultivated links with the outside world such as Europe and the Commonwealth, changing Britain's position and image in relation to these key regions (political and cultural)

Key Failures:

- Failed to tackle the instability of *'stop-go'* economics (economic)
- Failed to establish firm economic links with Europe (economic and political)
- Failed to develop policies clearly distinct from Labour (economic and social)
- Britain continued to suffer international decline, e.g. Suez Crisis (economic and political)
- Experienced some political scandals, e.g. Profumo Affair (political)
- Struggled to deal with influx of immigrants from Commonwealth countries after World War II (cultural)
- Heightened levels of youth and teenage disorder (cultural)
- By the early 1960s appeared out of touch with changing British society, in comparison to the more youthful and modernised image of Labour under Wilson (cultural)

Not exhaustive

Exercise: Key Revision Questions 1951–1964

1. Which political party dominated government in the 1950s?
   The Conservative Party – in power for nearly all of the decade (from 1951 onwards)

2. What name was given to the style of economic management adopted by the government in the 1950s?
   Stop-go Economics

3. What was 'consumerism' and what was the evidence of it during the 1950s?
   'Consumerism' was a term used to describe improved living standards for a significant number of ordinary British people during the 1950s, as was evident in increased sales of cars, TVs and washing machines, etc.

4. List the Conservative prime ministers between 1951 and 1964.
   Winston Churchill, Anthony Eden, Harold Macmillan, Alec Douglas-Home

5. What term was used to describe the similarity between Conservative and Labour policies during the 1950s and early 1960s?
   Butskellism

6. Why was Alec Douglas-Home an unusual choice as Conservative leader in 1963 given the changes in British society at the time?
   He was an upper-class aristocrat and a member of the House of Lords who seemed out of touch with 'modern' Britain.

The Sixties

Exercise: Labour's Social Policies (1964–1970)

Can you prioritise Labour's most significant and enduring social policies between 1964 and 1970?
1. First two Race Relations Acts (1965 & 1968)
2. Establishment of the Open University (1969)
3. Abolition of the death penalty (1965)
4. Legalisation of abortion and homosexuality (1967)
5. Relaxation of state censorship of the arts (1968) and liberalisation of divorce restrictions (1969)

Revision Exercise: Labour Government (1964–1970)

Outline the key successes and failures of the Labour government of 1964–1970.

Key Successes:

- Presided over a liberalisation of society; reforming and changing the law over areas such as abortion, the death penalty and divorce (social and cultural)
- Initiated the programme of *'comprehensive'* education (social)
- Introduced the first ever race relations legislation (social)
- Key social reforms such as creation of the Open University and the extension of the vote to 18 year olds (social)
- Sought a more active international role by intervening in Rhodesia and attempted to join the EEC (political)
- Sought to instil more liberal social attitudes on key moral issues (cultural)

Key Failures:

- Failed to address Britain's overall economic decline (political and economic)
- Failed to bring trade union power under control (social and economic)
- Presided over the devaluation of the pound – a national humiliation (political and economic)
- Liberal reforms arguably created a more permissive society with less respect for traditions and the rule of law (political, social and cultural)
- There was a higher volume of disorder and social unrest (cultural and political)
- Failed to retain control of key parts of the former Empire, e.g. Rhodesia and Uganda, creating domestic immigration issues as a result (political)

Not exhaustive

Exercise: Key Revision Questions 1964–1970

1. Name three landmark social reforms passed by the Wilson Government of 1964–70.
   Select from Race Relations Act (1965), abolition of death penalty (1965), legalisation of abortion and homosexuality (1967), liberalisation of divorce restrictions (1968)
2. What impact did popular culture have on British society during the 1960s?
   New influences arising from music, literature and television challenged traditional British cultural values. Such influences had a particular impact on younger generations. This sparked a reaction from conservative groups who were opposed to this growth of social liberal values.
3. What economic disaster faced the Labour government in 1967?
   Devaluation of the pound
4. What were the main consequences of the above economic disaster?
   Callaghan resigned as Chancellor, national humiliation, made exports cheaper, the pound dropped in value compared to other currencies
5. What was the name of the 1969 White Paper aimed at controlling trade union power and which politician proposed it?
   In Place of Strife – Barbara Castle

The end of post-war consensus

Revision Exercise: Conservative Government 1970–1974

Key Successes:

- Took Britain into the European Community (EEC) in 1973 – helped Britain's economic position (political, cultural and economic)
- Heath offered a more socially-inclusive image of Conservatism (social and political)
- Intervened to assist struggling British industries, e.g. Rolls Royce (economic)
- Brought the issue of wage restraints and control of public spending on to the political agenda (economic and social)
- Sought to reach a deal and work with the trade unions (economic and political)
- Emergence of more middle-class leaders, such as Heath, challenged traditional views of political leadership (cultural)

Key Failures:

- Failed to address Britain's economic problems – too much *'stop-go'* economics (economic)
- Reversed initial cutbacks in public spending (economic)
- Failed to tackle excessive trade union power (economic and social)
- Lost two elections in 1974 amidst industrial unrest and the *'three-day week'* (political)
- Triggered a future split in the Conservative Party due to membership of the EEC (political)
- EEC membership raised tensions in terms of Britain's international role and identity (cultural)

Not exhaustive

Exercise: Key Revision Questions 1970–1974

1. What name was given to Heath's new type of conservatism in 1970?
   Selsdon Man
2. What global influence pushed up oil prices in 1973–1974?
   The Arab-Israeli War of 1973
3. What term was used to describe the impact and consequence of the power cuts imposed across Britain by industrial action in 1973–1974?
   The 'three-day week'
4. What long-term impact did Heath's decision to join the EEC have on the Conservative Party over subsequent decades?
   Created significant splits and inter-party divisions between pro and anti-Europeans
5. What post-war economic policy did many in the Conservative Party want Heath to abandon?
   Keynesianism
6. Which trade union played a key role in the downfall of Heath's Government, and why was this so?
   National Union of Mineworkers (NUM) who were the country's biggest union and whose members suffered due to low wage settlements from the government

Writing Frame: Essay Structure Plan

Question Title

What were the key factors that influenced Britain's attitude to EEC membership between 1957 and 1973?

Introduction *(focus on and address the question title)*

- *Address the key factors that shaped Britain's attitude to the EEC during this specific period.*
- *What were the competing reasons and factors that influenced Britain's attitude to the EEC during this historical timeframe, and which were most significant?*

	Key arguments for membership and evidence:	**Key arguments against and evidence:**	**Other viewpoints and information to consider:**
Economic	The rate of economic growth within the original members of the EEC was greater than in Britain from 1957 onwards, and this made membership increasingly attractive to the British government (of both political parties in the 1950s and 60s).	Economic recovery was taking place anyway in Britain and joining the EEC was unnecessary on purely economic terms – it could in fact have led to some disruption to the post-war recovery.	Historian Eric Hobsbawm described this period as part of a post-war 'Golden Age' of economic growth – suggesting that growth outside of the EEC was clearly evident (so EEC membership was arguably not required).
	Key arguments for membership and evidence:	**Key arguments against and evidence:**	**Other viewpoints and information to consider:**
Social	Standards of living were struggling to improve at a quick enough rate in the post-war era, and membership of the EEC would arguably improve trade, employment prospects, economic growth and living standards for ordinary people.	An 'isolationist' viewpoint envisaged that joining the EEC would have a negative and disruptive effect on British industry and businesses, leading to lower living standards in general due to increased EEC competition.	Lingering anti-German and even xenophobic feeling remained in some parts of British society, evident in the growth of the National Front.
	Key arguments for membership and evidence:	**Key arguments against and evidence:**	**Other viewpoints and information to consider:**
Political	There was a political argument that as a 'great power' for much of the years beforehand (pre-1945 in particular), Britain needed to be involved in key European decision-making within the EEC organisation.	The alternative political viewpoint opposed to EEC membership suggested that by joining the EEC, Britain would be abandoning its status as a great political power in its own right and undermining the country's national sovereignty.	Churchill and other 'imperialists' wanted Britain to focus on trade links with the remainder of its Empire and the 'special relationship' with the USA rather than Europe.
	Key arguments for membership and evidence:	**Key arguments against and evidence:**	**Other viewpoints and information to consider:**
International Scene	Having been sidelined by the bipolar (two-power) nature and structure of the Cold War from 1945 onwards, Britain needed to maintain a role and influence at an international level, and the EEC provided that outlet and opportunity.	The more nationalist, patriotic argument (Enoch Powell) believed that Britain could retain an important international role as a great power which still had an Empire (and Commonwealth) and its own national sovereignty – it, therefore, did not need to join the EEC.	Aftermath of the Suez Crisis (1956) suggested that Britain was in decline as a great power in its own right and needed to join the EEC to preserve its influence.

Conclusion: Focus on the question title and address the issues raised in the main body of the answer, attempting to reach a measured judgment if possible. Try to identify the main factor in justifying Britain's attitude to the EEC during this period – economic, social, political or international – or maybe a combination of several?

Exercise: Key Problems facing Britain in the 1970s

Broad answers/feedback
The final sequence of what issues are deemed to be most significant will ultimately depend on each student, but here are some suitable reasons for each point listed:

Political instability:
During the 1970s, Britain had four separate general elections and three changes of government. Such a situation seemed to indicate an unstable political system that lacked direction. Such a political system appeared to create the conditions for civil, and significant trade union, unrest in particular, a situation that put both Conservative and Labour governments under considerable strain.

Unemployment:
Unemployment began creeping up throughout the 1970s as the country's economic condition gradually worsened. Although it never reached the high levels of the 1980s, by the late 1970s the figure stood at 1.5 million and this played a part in Labour's election defeat and was an issue that the Conservatives successfully highlighted in the 1979 general election.

Inflation:
During the 1970s the rate of inflation *(cost of goods)* appeared to be out of control, with the figure peaking at 26% in the mid-1970s at the height of the nation's economic crisis. Such a figure was exacerbated by the high wage demands of the trade unions which many felt were irresponsible given the condition of the country's economy. Such high wage demands simply created further inflationary pressures. The challenge of tackling inflation became a key priority of Margaret Thatcher and the Conservatives after their 1979 election victory.

Decline of key industries:
A major factor in Britain's economic decline in the 1970s was the stark fact that many traditional industries such as coal, steel, shipbuilding and manufacturing appeared to be in a seriously weak economic condition. Many felt that the only reason they remained in business was due to the high levels of government subsidies supplied to such industries, the majority of which were state-owned. Such an industrial situation was focused on by the Thatcher Government after 1979, and her administration offered limited levels of support for such industries by comparison, instead exposing them to the harsh realities of the free market.

High taxation:
The high levels of public spending that were a feature of Britain in the 1970s were a key factor in the growth in inflation and the high levels of taxation. Public spending verged on 50% of the country's total GDP in the middle of the decade, and such a Keynesian approach had led to the need for loans from the IMF in 1976. The high levels of income tax featured a top rate ranging between 60 and 98%, which many believed was a disincentive to work hard and which damaged the ability of the business community to generate wealth. This was another area that was radically reformed by Margaret Thatcher after 1979.

Trade union power:
Trade unions had become progressively more powerful in Britain as the post-war years had progressed. Much of this initial power had reflected their crucial role in World War II, and by the 1970s more than half of the active workforce were members of trade unions. Such levels of membership, estimated at 13.5 million in 1979, brought some considerable wealth, power and influence to trade unions. By the 1970s they were seen as being responsible for the downfall of Heath's Conservative Government in 1974, and they inflicted excessive pay demands on the Labour government of 1974–1979 that culminated in the *'Winter of Discontent'*. The wave of strikes led many to believe that trade unions were crippling the British economy with their disruption and unreasonable pay demands. Such unaccountable power led many to question whether trade unions were effectively running the country in the 1970s instead of the elected politicians. The Thatcher administration would subsequently strip the movement of many of its key powers after 1979.

Weak politicians:
The 1970s featured various political leaders such as Heath, Wilson and Callaghan, who for a variety of reasons were not viewed as particularly strong leaders during such a difficult period. The image of this period was that politicians were being pushed around by trade union leaders and external economic forces. Again, this was noted by Margaret Thatcher and shaped her subsequent leadership style from 1979 onwards.

Revision Exercise: 1974–1979

Outline the key successes and failures of the Labour government of 1974–1979.

Key Successes:

- Had some short-term success in restraining trade union power (economic, social and political)
- Endorsed Britain's membership of the EEC via referendum (political)
- Smooth transition of power from Wilson to Callaghan (political)
- Managed to stay in power despite small parliamentary majority (political)
- There were some signs of economic progress after the IMF crisis (economic and political)
- There were improved rights for women in the workplace following various gender equality legislation (political and cultural)
- New musical and cultural trends sought to positively tackle racial divisions (cultural)

Key Failures:

- Failed to address Britain's economic decline and had to borrow money from the IMF (economic and social)
- Allowed trade union power to escalate out of control in the *'Winter of Discontent'* (economic and political)
- Inflation appeared to be out of control (economic)
- Internal Labour Party splits were becoming evident and after the 1979 election defeat it resulted in the creation of the SDP (political)
- Living standards suffered due to the poor economic and industrial conditions (economic and social)
- Ongoing racial tensions linked to post-war immigration (cultural)
- New musical and cultural trends could be linked to negative forms of racial tension (cultural)

Not exhaustive

Exercise: Key Revision Questions 1974–1979

1. What was the name of Callaghan's policy for dealing with the trade unions from 1976 onwards?
   The Social Contract

2. Margaret Thatcher's policies from the late 1970s onwards marked the end of a period known as 'The Years of ...'?
   Consensus

3. How did women's rights improve during the 1970s?
   The Equal Pay Act of 1970 and the Sex Discrimination Act of 1975 were introduced

4. What was the period of industrial unrest in the winter of 1978–1979 also known as?
   The Winter of Discontent

5. Outline the main reasons why Labour lost the 1979 general election.
   Excessive trade union power, economic failings, attractive Conservative opposition policies

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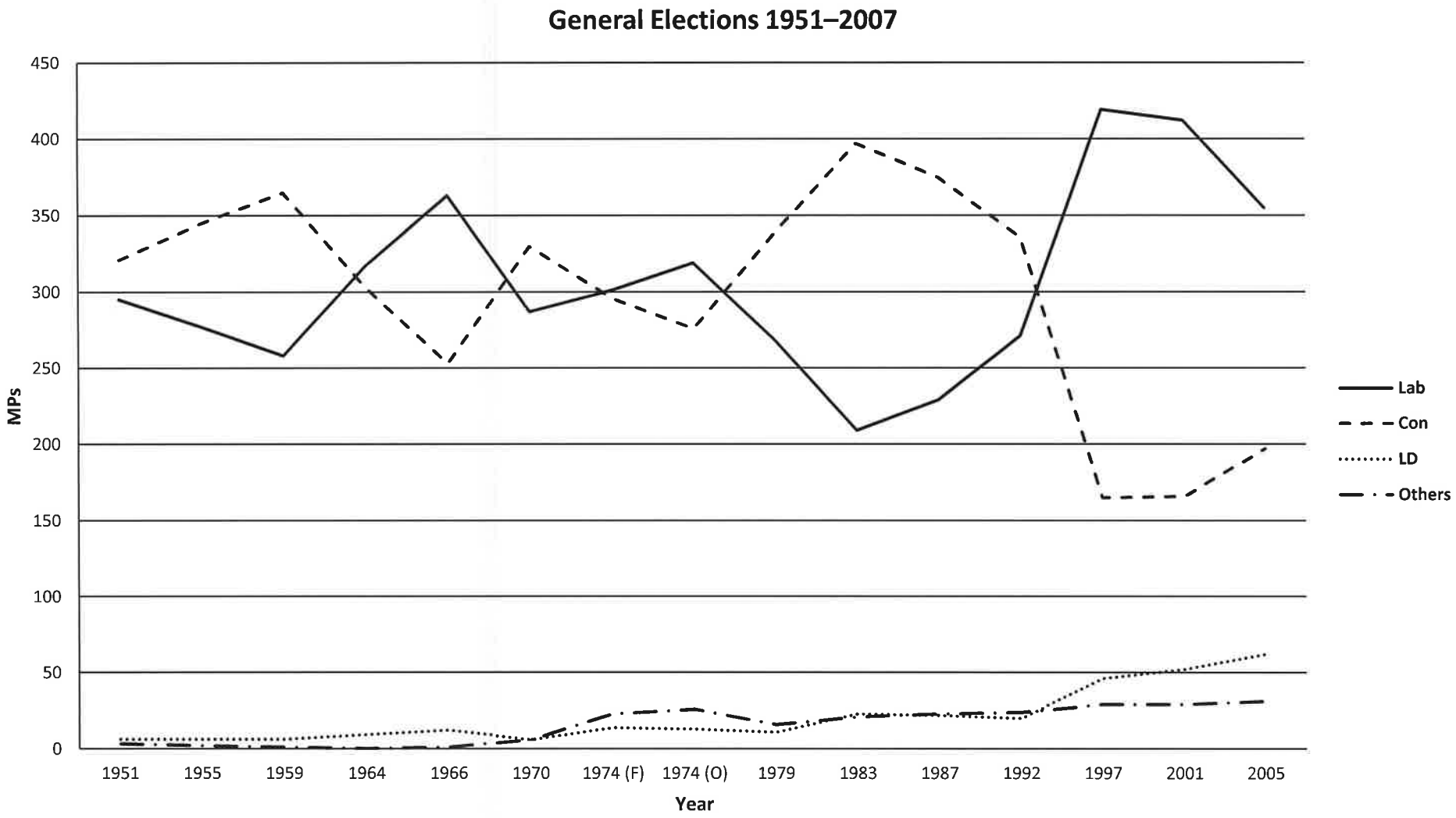
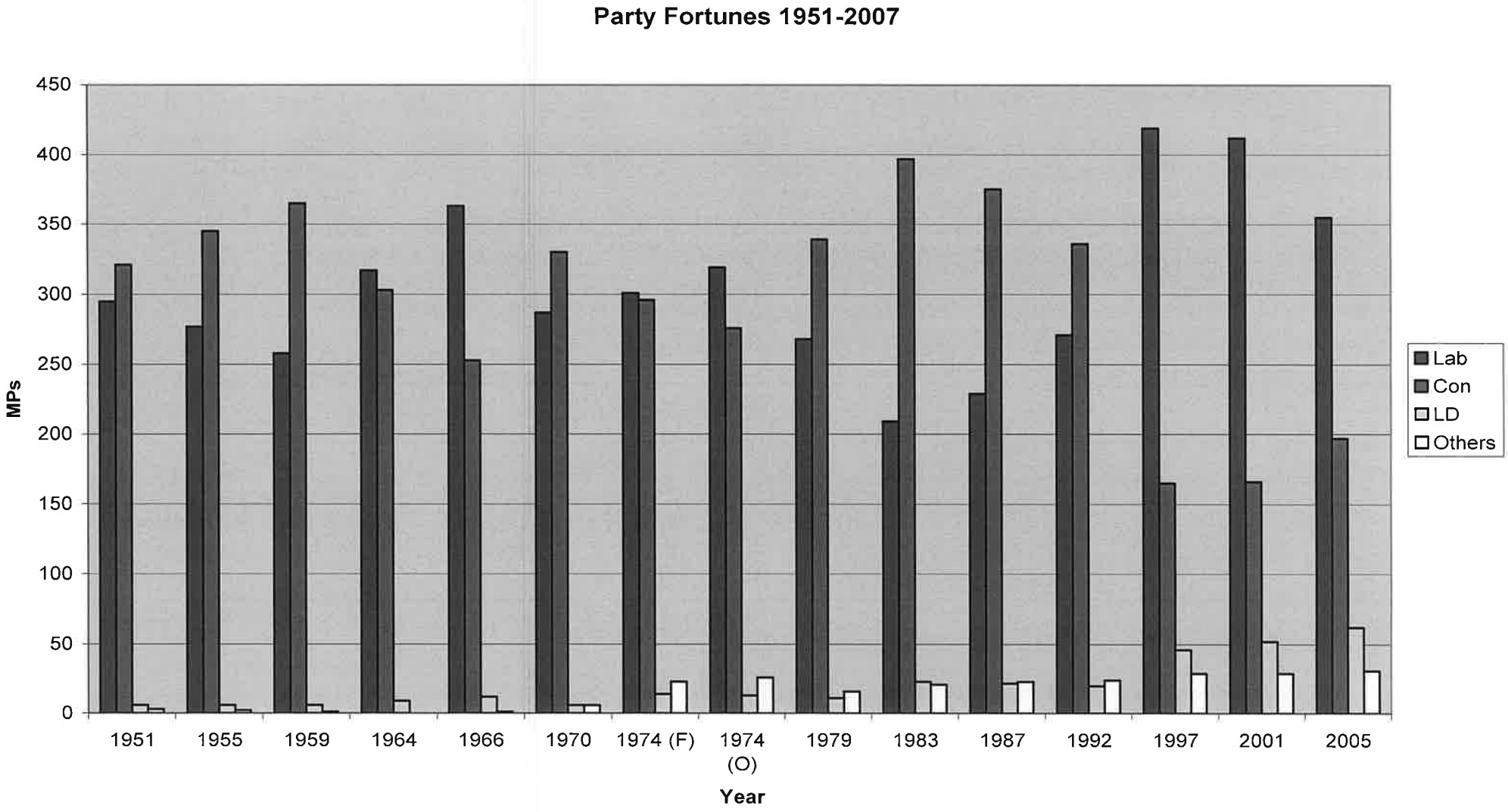
Appendix – Charts and Data



Period in Office 1951–2007:

- Conservative – 35 years
- Labour – 21 years



SUMMARY OF UK GENERAL ELECTION RESULTS 1951–2007

	Party			
Year	Conservative	Labour	Liberal	Others
1951	321	295	6	3
1955	345	277	6	2
1959	365	258	6	1
1964	304	317	9	0
1966	253	363	12	1
1970	330	288	6	6
1974 (F)	297	301	14	23
1974 (O)	277	319	13	26
1979	339	269	11	16
1983	397	209	23	21
1987	376	229	22	23
1992	336	271	20	24
1997	165	418	46	30
2001	166	412	52	29
2005	198	356	62	30

(Source: Dennis Kavanagh & Philip Cowley, *The British General Election of 2010*, 2010)