

Brit. Politics in the Post-war Period

Brit. politics in the post-war period were marked by 3 characteristics:

1. **The full democratization of elect. law** (suffrage granted to men from age 21, to women from age 30 in 1918; women from age 21 in 1928).
2. **The decline of the Lib. party and the rise of the Lab. party;**
3. **Difficulties in for. affairs** (Fr.-Brit. tensions on the Rhine and in the Near East in the 1920s, conflicts with the for. policy of Fascism and Nat. Socialism in the 1930s). **Basic tenor of Brit. for. policy:** no engagement on the Continent (refusal to go along with plans to give milit. muscle to the League of Nations), but closer relations with the dominions and colonies.

Dec. 1918 The 'Coupon election' leading to the vict. of a coalition of the Liberals (in the minority) under LLOYD GEORGE (p. 104) and the Conservatives under ANDREW BONAR LAW (p. 129).

1919-22 Wave of strikes by the miners; railmen, dockers, and other workers employed in transport also demanded increased wages. They ended because of the moderate attitudes of such union leaders as SMILLIE, HODGES, THOMAS and Ernest Bevin (1881-1951), who, in 1922, was able to fuse 32 unions into the Transport and General Workers' Union (T.&G.W.U.), the largest trade union in the world; the termination of the waves of strikes was also aided by soc. measures of the gvt, such as the 1919 Addison Act and the 1920 Unemployment Law and the Depression.

Discontinuation of the involvement of the gvt in those aspects of econ. life that had been under controls during the war and economies in the ministries ('Geddes's axe'). Lib. econ. policies failed (unemployment rose); the Conservatives pleaded for protective tariffs, the Lab. party for moderate programmes of socialization.

The difficulties in Ireland led to the conclusion of a

1921 compromise treaty (p. 170), which was opposed by the Con. right wing.

1922 The Cannes Conference did not eliminate Franco-Brit. differences in the Near East (p. 135).

1922 The Genoa Conference failed in the attempt to bring the U.S.S.R. back into the world-wide econ. system.

1921-2 Washington Conference (p. 134). Britain, although in theory on a parity with the U.S. as a leading naval power, lost prestige as a world power and had to abandon naval supremacy. After the

1922 discontinuation of the protectorate over Egypt (p. 179) and difficulties in India (p. 169).

Oct. 1922 meeting of the Conservatives in the Carlton Club. The group BONAR LAW, STANLEY BALDWIN (1867-1947) and Lord CURZON (1859-1925), won the decision to leave the coalition by 187 votes against 87 by those around AUSTEN CHAMBERLAIN (1863-1937) and Lord BIRKENHEAD (1872-1930), who wished to continue supporting the gvt.

The Politics of the Conservatives (1922-9)

1922 Formation of a Con. Cabinet under BONAR LAW, which was confirmed in office in the elections of Nov.: Lib. losses and gains for the Lab. party, which became the strongest party in opposition ('His Majesty's Opposition'). After

BONAR LAW's retirement (for reasons of health), 1923 STANLEY BALDWIN became prime minister, uniting the Con. party. However, Parliament was dissolved, because BALDWIN had demanded authority to introduce protective tariffs to combat unemployment. The election of Dec. was won by the Conservatives. They won 258, the Lab. party 191, the Liberals 158 seats in the House of Commons. Nevertheless,

1924 the 1st Lab. Cabinet under James Ramsay MacDonald (1866-1937) was formed; it was supported by the Liberals, making innovations in domestic policies difficult. At the London Conference (Dawes Plan, p. 135), MACDONALD contributed to the settlement of the reparations problem and the termination of the conflict in the Ruhr (p. 149). The

Feb. 1924 *de jure* recognition of the U.S.S.R. was followed by trade negotiations which had to be broken off after the Campbell affair (an attempt to charge the Communist editor of the *Workers' Weekly* with incitement to mutiny) and the

Oct. 1924 publication of the 'Zinoviev Letter' (purporting a connection between the Comintern and revolutionary movements in Britain). A vote of no confidence led to the dissolution of Parliament.

Oct. 1924 Elect. vict. of the Conservatives.

1924-9 2nd Baldwin Cabinet.

1925 Britain returned to the gold Standard. This attempt to stabilize the pound was made by the Chancellor of the Exchequer, WINSTON CHURCHILL (1874-1965); it was unsuccessful because the pound was over-valued.

1926 A strike of miners led to the General Strike, called in support by the trade unions, but collapsed after 9 days, though the miners stayed out for 7 months. The freedom of the unions was restricted by the 1927 Trade Disputes and Trade Union Act.

1926 Treaty with Iraq: independence was acknowledged. The conflict with France over oil concessions was settled in the Treaty of Mosul (p. 135).

1927 Diplomatic relations with the U.S.S.R. were broken off. Reasons: support for the miners' strike through the Rus. trade-union movement and Communist-inspired agitation in the Ind. Raj. (A raid on the London HQ of the Soviet-Brit. trading Co., Arcos, was a polit. blunder that revealed no evidence.)

1928 Treaty with China: recognition of the Nanking gvt.

Depression and Rearmament (1929-35)

As a result of the business recession and increased unemployment, the Lab. party won the

1929 election, obtaining 287 seats against 260 to the

Conservatives and 59 to the Liberals, who did not use their votes to prevent the formation of the

1929-31 2nd MacDonald Cabinet (p. 146). Econ. considerations prompted the resumption of relations with the U.S.S.R.: Brit.-Soviet trade had suffered at the expense of Ger.-Soviet trade; Amer. oil firms were competing in the Eur. market. After settlement of the naval question with the U.S.A. (the 'cruiser dispute'), the

1930 Naval Conference of London was convoked (p. 134). The consequences of the world-wide depression (p. 185), the rumours over the grisly state of the public finances (the May Report), the burdening of the budget because of the support given to the unemployed (the 'dole'), but esp. unemployment itself (reaching 2.5 mil. in Dec. 1930), led to a Cabinet crisis.

1931 Resignation of the gvt and formation of a 'Nat.' MacDonald Cabinet, supported by Conservatives and Liberals; a majority of the Lab. party under ARTHUR HENDERSON (1863-1935) and GEORGE LANSBURY (1859-1940) went into opposition. Parliament passed an emergency budget (economy measures and increase in taxation). The gold standard was abandoned. The devaluation of the pound improved the competitive position of Brit. goods in world markets.

Oct. 1931 The result of the elections endorsed the policies of the 'Nat. Gvt': 554 Nat. gvt members faced 52 Lab. members.

1931-5 Nat. gvt (MacDonald prime minister). It was based on Con., Lib. and 13 'Nat.' Lab. members. Of the Conservatives, the most powerful were STANLEY BALDWIN and Neville Chamberlain (1869-1940). The gvt abandoned the trad. policy of free trade, but did not pursue a planned programme to fight the crisis. Statute of Westminster (p. 170).

1932 Ottawa Imp. Conference (granting of preferential tariffs (the 'preferential system') in the trade between Britain and the Commonwealth countries). Split of the Liberals; the Lib. for. secretary, Sir JOHN SIMON (1873-1954) remained in the Cabinet. The depression was overcome by the import of low-priced primary goods from the primary-goods-producing countries and finan. gvt measures. Loans were granted, interest was guaranteed, interest rates reduced; war loans were converted from 5% to 3½% and the currency was stabilized through the Exchange Equalization Fund. Nevertheless, there still were 1.6 mil. unemployed. The attempt to bring about an int. monetary agreement failed at the

1933 World Econ. Conference of London.

For. policy in relation to Germany and Japan remained ambiguous.

1934 Beginning of rearmament (the R.A.F.); and, because of Ger. rearmament, demands were made for

1935 an extensive armaments programme.

At the Stresa Conference (p. 159), Britain was briefly able to gain MUSSOLINI as an ally against Germany.

The Politics of Appeasement (1935-9)

1935-7 The 'Nat. Gvt' of Baldwin pursued a policy of appeasement. It attempted to avoid war through negotiations, since it shied away from the costs of armament and was sympathetic to the moderate revisionist claims of the defeated powers. Consequences:

1935 Ger.-Brit. naval agreement (p. 197). Under pressure of public opinion the gvt changed its position in relation to Italy: it supported the econ. sanctions decided on by the League of Nations (p. 137). The subsequent election was won (Oct. 1935). The for. secretary Sir SAMUEL HOARE, who had agreed to LAVAL's plan for the partition of Abyssinia (p. 191), was forced to resign from the Cabinet. The policy of 'collective security' was abandoned under the for. secretary, Anthony Eden (b. 1897). But Britain returned to the politics of appeasement and therefore held back during the 1936 occupation by Germany of the Rhineland (p. 197). The Brit.-Ital. agreement stipulating the maintenance of the status quo in the Mediterranean (the 'Gentlemen's Agreement', 1937), was also a consequence of the ambiguous policy of appeasement.

1936 Death of King GEORGE V (monarch since 1910). EDWARD VIII (later Duke of Windsor, 1894-1972) was forced to abdicate when the Brit. and Dominion gvts found his intention of marrying the Amer. divorcee Mrs W. W. SIMPSON incompatible with his position as monarch.

1936-52 GEORGE VI. Following the coronation, BALDWIN resigned from the Cabinet.

1937-40 The gvt of Neville Chamberlain. Continuation of the politics of appeasement. EDEN resigned as for. secretary because of the concessions made to Italy. Lord HALIFAX (1881-1959) became his successor.

Apr. 1938 Brit.-Ital. Agreement: recognition of Ital. rule in Abyssinia; withdrawal of Ital. volunteers from Spain after the termination of the war.

Sep. 1938 Munich Agreement (p. 197). After the joint Ger.-Brit. declaration and the occupation of the 'rump' of Czechoslovakia, the politics of appeasement were abandoned.

1939 Introduction of gen. conscription. Checks to the aggressive for. policy of the Nat. Socialists were contrived by the proclamation of guarantees; but owing to the improvement of relations between Germany and the U.S.S.R., a Brit.-Fr.-Soviet Mutual Assistance Pact (Aug. 1939) failed to materialize. (For the outbreak of the war, see p. 197.)

1940 Winston Churchill (1874-1965) formed a coalition Cabinet. CHAMBERLAIN remained in the Cabinet as Lord President of the Council for the last 6 months of his life.

The Crisis Years (1931-40)

1932-40 Presidency of Albert Lebrun (1871-1950). Elect. vict. of the parties of the Left and formation of the

Jun.-Dec. 1932 Herriot Cabinet (p. 147), which contained a majority of ministers from the Rad. party; it fell because of the continued payment of debts to the U.S.A. The period was marked by frequent changes of gvt (PAUL-BONCOUR, DALADIER, SARRAUT, CHAUTEPS) and a persistent fiscal crisis, resulting from the Fr. parliament's