

# 1951-1964— BQ1: Why did the Conservatives dominate?

## Prime Ministers:

Winston Churchill 1951-55

Anthony Eden 1955-57

Harold Macmillan 1957-63

Alec Douglas-Home 1963-64

## Chancellors:

Rab Butler 1951-55

Harold Macmillan 1955-57

Peter Thorneycroft 1957-58

Derrick Heathcote-Amory 1958-1960

Selwyn Lloyd 1960-62

Reginald Maudling 1962-64

## Leaders of the opposition (Labour):

Clement Attlee 1951-1955

Hugh Gaitskell 1955-1963

Harold Wilson 1963-64

## General Elections:

1950 - **Attlee 315, Churchill 298 (5)**

1951 - **Churchill 321 Attlee 295 (17)**

1955 - **Eden 345 Attlee 277 (60)**

1959 - **Macmillan 365 Gaitskell 258 (100)**

1964 - **Wilson 317 Douglas-Home 304 (4)**

## Labour divisions

The 1950's were a time when Labour was deeply divided between the Gaitskellites (right of party) and the Bevanites (left of party)

- CND—a protest group supported by many Labour politicians who wanted unilateral nuclear disarmament. Many in party and public were pro-nuclear including Gaitskell himself
- Trade unions—Labour leader after 1955 Gaitskell clashed with Trade Unions over proposed removal of Clause IV (commitment to nationalisation) and nuclear disarmament, which the unions supported. Labour conferences of 1959 dominated by arguments between right and left.

## Conservative policies

One key reason Conservatives enjoyed success in 1950's elections was their policies.

- Post-war consensus: Maintained Keynesianism economics of state intervention and support as well as spending on the NHS and commitment to full employment. Employment never below 3% and was as low as 1% in 1955.
- Give-away budgets: Tax cuts before an election to entice middle-class voters. Rab Butler £134 million 1955, Derrick Heathcote-Amory £350 million 1959
- Other policies: Harold Macmillan was very popular as Housing Minister 1951-55 building 300,000 new homes per year. Some policies introduced to try and improve Britain like Clean Air Act 1956, Housing Acts 1957 and 1961, Homicide Act 1957.

## Post-War Consensus:

Broad agreement between Labour and Conservative from around 1945-79

- 1) Support for NHS / welfare state
- 2) Full employment
- 3) Work with trade unions
- 4) Mixed economy
- 5) Government intervention

## Popular leaders

Throughout the 1950's, the Conservatives always had leaders who were popular with the public at the times of elections.

- Winston Churchill: Although booted out of office in a landslide in 1945, Churchill remained a popular war-time leader.
- Anthony Eden: Seen as a safe pair of hands to take over from Churchill. A confident and good-looking man who the public trusted as he had been a politician for so long.
- Harold Macmillan: "Supermac" popular as Housing Minister and very good with the media.