Ch. 4 - Economic And Social Problems In Britain During The Inter-War Years, 1920-39

CH.4 - ECONOMIC AND SOCIAL PROBLEMS IN BRITAIN DURING THE INTER-WAR YEARS, 1920-39

Learning Intentions

In this section, you should understand:

- The causes of British economic depression in the 1920s and 1930s.
- Social conditions in Britain in the inter-war years.
- The role of John Maynard Keynes.
- Case Study: The Jarrow March.

BRITAIN IN THE INTER-WAR YEARS, 1920-39

BRITAIN IN THE INTER-WAR YEARS, 1920-39

@MsDoorley

Introduction

In 1918, when the First World War ended, Britain counted the cost. Although the country suffered little physical damage, 750,000 soldiers were killed and many more were wounded. **Inflation** doubled and government spending on the war increased the National Debt by ten times. This was paid for out of increased taxation and borrowing from home and abroad, especially America.

However, there was hope at the end of the war. The Prime Minister, David Lloyd George, promised a ***'Land fit for Heroes'*** - a better society for all to live in. But this did not happen. After a brief post-war boom, from 1918 to 1920, the British economy went into **depression** from which it never fully recovered until the Second World War.

KEY CONCEPT: DEPRESSION	KEY CONCEPT INFLATION
Depression is a term used to describe when an economy is doing badly; industrial production declines, factories and businesses close and there is widespread unemployment.	**Inflation** is an increase in the prices of products, usually a large increase.

Causes of the British Economic Depression in the 1920s

The **depressed state** of the British economy in the 1920s was due to a number of factors:

- The decline of Britain's **staple industries** (coal, iron and steel, shipbuilding, cotton).
- The development of industry in other parts of the world.
- The decline of British trade.
- American competition.
- British wage costs.

In the nineteenth and early twentieth century British prosperity depended a great deal on its export trade. Iron and steel, shipbuilding, cotton textiles and coal were the staple industries. But after the First World War these **older** industries went into decline and the British economy suffered for the next 20 years. The decline in these industries caused structural unemployment which lasted in some parts of Britain all during the inter-war years, 1920–39.

Shipbuilding: After the First World War, there was a general decline in world trade so there was a **surplus of ships**. During the war, other countries such as the US and Japan began to produce their own ships. British shipyards fell behind in design and construction techniques. This decline in shipbuilding meant a drop in iron and steel production.

Causes of the British Economic Depression in the 1920s

Cotton: Britain was the leading cotton producer before the First World War. But during the war, Britain lost some of its traditional markets such as China and India. They were replaced by the growth of home industries in those countries and by products from the US and Japan.
Coal Mining: Coal was another of Britain's staple industries. But after the war, British coal lost markets to American, German and Polish coal. British coal was mined largely by **shovels and picks**, but mechanical mining was more developed in Germany and the US. Coal also faced **competition** as a source of energy from petrol, oil and electricity. The economic difficulties facing coal mining brought the mine owners and the miners into conflict in strikes and lockouts, such as the General Strike of 1926.

The Location of Industry - Depressed Areas

Not all of Britain was affected by the decline of these industries. They were mainly concentrated in:

- **Clydeside** (Shipbuilding and engineering)
- **Tyneside** (North-east England) (Shipbuilding and coal mining)
- **Lancashire** (Cotton and engineering)
- **South Wales** (Coal mining)

The result of this industrial concentration was **depressed areas**, marked by high unemployment, low labour participation by women and other social problems such as a high infant mortality.

In contrast, the **Greater London area** and the **Midlands** were more prosperous. The contrast was great enough that people differentiated between **inner Britain** and the depressed state of **outer Britain**. In inner Britain the newer industries such as motor cars, electrical and consumer goods were being manufactured. These industries were more productive and were dependent on the home market.

REVIEW QUESTIONS

1. How did the older industries contribute to the decline in Britain in the 1920s and 1930s?
2. Which areas in Britain were worse hit by the decline of the older industries?

Government Policy

Government policy also contributed to the economic depression in Britain in the 1920s. The government followed the traditional economic policy of the nineteenth and early twentieth century of intervening very little in the economy. The government wanted to **balance the budget** so it was not prepared to borrow money to help industry. Instead it was more concerned about the large National Debt which had developed during the war.

In 1925, **Churchill** as Chancellor of the Exchequer decided to fix the value of the £ Sterling to the **Gold Standard**. It was fixed at $4.86 to the £ and many economists, including **J M Keynes**, said this was too high. The government hoped to control inflation by fixing the exchange rate (between different countries), but it also made British **exports dearer**, and thereby damaged **British trade** and slowed down economic growth. The government also kept **interest rates** high and this reduced investment and spending. These policies worsened economic conditions in Britain in the 1920s.

The Dole

By December 1920 over 800,000 had lost their jobs in Britain. This increased to over 2 million by June 1921. By this time the **National Insurance Act** had extended unemployment benefit to most workers. However, there were problems with the scheme. It only provided 15 shillings a week for men and 12 shillings a week for women. This was not enough to support families for food, rent, electricity and heating. The benefit was also limited to 15 weeks a year because it was aimed at **short-term unemployment**. The scheme could not cope with the **new long-term unemployment**. To solve this problem the government allowed workers get the additional benefits - called the **dole** - from the Poor Law Guardians. They had to queue each week to obtain this.

Wage Cuts

Those who had jobs also suffered from the economic depression. Cotton, engineering, shipbuilding and mine workers all had wages cut. But after the First World War, the trade unions were in a stronger position to resist those wage cuts. There were about 8 million trade union members in 1921 and some unions joined together to form bigger and stronger unions, such as the Amalgamated Engineering Union and the Transport and General Workers' Union. Some economists argued that wages were still too high and that this made British industry uncompetitive, thereby causing unemployment.

There were particular problems in the **coal industry**, and clashes between mine owners and workers eventually led to the General Strike in 1926. It was inevitable that there would be conflict between the owners who wanted wage cuts and longer working hours and the workers who wanted **nationalisation** (government ownership), higher wages and shorter working hours.

REVIEW QUESTIONS

1. What was the government policy on the budget?
2. What was the effect of fixing the value of sterling to the gold standard?
3. How did unemployment benefit work?
4. Who got the dole?
5. Did wage cuts work?

The General Strike, 1926

The conflict came to a head in 1925 when mine owners looked for further wage cuts. The selling price of coal in export markets had increased by 10 per cent when Britain went back on the Gold Standard. The workers' leader, A. J. Cook, responded with, 'Not a penny of the pay! Not a minute of the day!' This time the miners were backed by the **Trades Union Congress** (**TUC**). The government agreed to pay a subsidy to maintain the miners' wages until a government commission, the **Samuel Commission**, enquired into the coal industry.

The Samuel Commission recommended that the mines be modernised, but also supported wage cuts and longer hours. The workers refused to accept this. When the government subsidy ended on 31 April 1926, the mine owners locked out the workers. The TUC supported the miners and when negotiations with the government broke down, a General Strike began on 3 May 1926.

The General Strike in Progress

Transport, railway, building, printing, gas and electricity workers were called out on strike in support of the miners. This involved about 2 million workers, including 1 million miners. The remaining workers were held **in reserve**.

But, the Strike only lasted nine days as the government plans to counter it worked. The government set up the **OMS** (**Organisation for the Maintenance of Supplies**) which distributed food from Hyde Park, food convoys were protected by soldiers and thousands of volunteers - mostly middle class - drove cars, lorries, buses and even trains. During the Strike, **Churchill** was responsible for publishing the British Gazette which at its peak had a circulation of 2.2 million. In this way, the government got its message across in spite of strikes in the newspapers. While many people were sympathetic to the miners, they felt that the country was being held to ransom for their cause.

The TUC leaders called off the Strike when the government said there would be no victimisation if the strike ended. The **miners** were left to carry on their own strike. But they had to accept defeat six months later with **longer hours** and **less pay**.

Effects of the General Strike

- The TUC was hurt by the failure of the strike - over the next few years union **membership fell** by almost 2 million.
- The government passed the **Trades Dispute Act** (1927) which outlawed general strikes. It also said trade unions could no longer use members' dues (subscriptions) to support the Labour Party unless they agreed.
- The spirit of **trade union militancy** was broken. The unions adapted a new strategy - more negotiation and co-operation instead of conflict. Industrial relations generally were improved, as there were fewer strikes after 1926.
- The General Strike also increased **class and social tensions** because of the role of middle class volunteers in the government's plans to counter the effects of the strike.

The Great Depression in Britain

The **Wall Street Crash** affected Britain in the same way as other countries. When the New York Stock Exchange crashed in October 1929, its effects spread worldwide. International trade fell, factories closed and unemployment rose. The collapse of trade affected Britain's export industries so they had to cut production. Britain's unemployment, at 1.5 million in 1929, was high even before the Depression began. By 1932, unemployment rose to 3.4 million or one-fifth of the labour force.

Most of the **rise in unemployment** was in the older industries already in difficulties in the 1920s coal, iron and steel, shipbuilding and cotton. The greatest losses were also in the areas where these industries were located - Lancashire, South Wales, North-east England and Central Scotland.

What action did the government take to improve the economy?

In Britain, there was a government financial crisis in 1931. There was a large budget deficit - the government spent £120 million more than it got in taxes, mostly in unemployment benefit and on the National Debt. The problem of how to tackle the budget deficit cut the unemployment benefit or leave the Gold Standard - led to the downfall of the Labour Government. However, the new government - the **National Government** - was led by the same Prime Minister, **Ramsay McDonald**; and Chancellor of the Exchequer, Philip Snowdon, mainly supported by the Conservative and Liberal Parties, and only 12 Labour MPs.

The government took difficult decisions:

- It took Britain off the Gold Standard; very quickly the sterling fell 30 per cent in value.
- The government also cut unemployment benefit by 10 per cent and introduced a **Means Test** (people lost benefit if they had other income, savings or if any of the family had a job).
- **Wages** of civil servants, soldiers and teachers were **cut**.

What action did the government take to improve the economy?

These actions balanced the budget.

- An **Import Duties Act** was introduced which put a tariff (tax) on imports (protectionism). This was the end of Britain's Free Trade policy.
- **Special Areas Act, 1934**. The Government proposed to give help to Special Areas (depressed areas) to encourage the building of factories. But this was not a success. Less than 15,000 jobs were created.
- The bank **interest rate** was lowered so people could borrow to buy cars and houses.
- The increased demand for consumer goods created more jobs.

All these actions contributed to ending the Great Depression in Britain from 1934 onwards.

REVIEW QUESTIONS

1. How badly did the Great Depression hit Britain?
2. What actions did the British government take to end the depression?
3. How did the actions improve the economy?

The Condition of the People - Social Problems

Unemployment benefit was now based on a **means test** - once the insurance benefits were ended, any additional payments (the dole) depended on any earnings by other members of the family. This was assessed by officials visiting the homes of workers to check on the income and savings of the family.

Unemployment benefit was looked on as **a charity, not a right**. This affected the esteem and self-respect of the workers. J. B. Priestley wrote in English Journey of *'men who, though they knew they were idle through no fault of their own, felt defeated and somewhat tainted'*. Orwell said, 'The middle classes were still talking about *"lazy idle loafers on the dole"."* Unemployment lasted a long time for some workers. In 1936, a quarter of the unemployed were out of work for over a year. Some young men had never worked.

'In the distressed areas, there was a gloomy atmosphere of sadness, of bored resignation and despair... In the streets of towns, large and small, the unemployed walked aimlessly up and down... Beggars in rags sold matches, boot polish, boot-laces; pilferers took bits of coal from railway sidings... Everywhere one found shops closed and houses shut with their windows boarded up.'

F Bedarida, A Social History of England, 1851-1990

The Condition of the People - Social Problems

Unemployment was the **main cause of poverty**. A survey carried out in York in 1935-6 by Seebohm Rowntree found that 31 per cent of the people were living below the poverty line, and this was mostly caused by unemployment. Even many of the employed were on such low wages that they did not have enough for food after spending money on rent, clothing, fuel and light.

Poverty contributed to death and disease among the poorer classes. Orwell wrote, *'in any large industrial town* ***the death rate and infant mortality rate*** *of the poorest districts are always about double those of the well-to-do residential quarters.'* His views were supported by studies at the time. This was partly due to the poor diet of the unemployed.

The Condition of the People - Social Problems

Unemployment was the **main cause of poverty**. A survey carried out in York in 1935-6 by Seebohm Rowntree found that 31 per cent of the people were living below the poverty line, and this was mostly caused by unemployment. Even many of the employed were on such low wages that they did not have enough for food after spending money on rent, clothing, fuel and light.

Poverty contributed to death and disease among the poorer classes. Orwell wrote, *'in any large industrial town* ***the death rate and infant mortality rate*** *of the poorest districts are always about double those of the well-to-do residential quarters.'* His views were supported by studies at the time. This was partly due to the poor diet of the unemployed.

Hunger Marches

To highlight the long-term unemployment in the depressed areas, a series of marches, called **hunger marches,** were organised. These were organised by the **National Unemployed Workers' Movement (NUWM)**. This organisation was active since the early 1920s but the Labour Party and the TUC shunned it because the Communist Party dominated its leadership. The NUWM organised a march to London of 2,000 people in 1932, and further marches in 1934 and 1936. There were also local demonstrations and marches in Belfast, Glasgow and elsewhere. These sometimes resulted in clashes with the police. The **Jarrow March** or **Crusade** in 1936 had the same aims as the hunger marches, but it was organised separately.

In spite of increased unemployment during the Great Depression, Britain did not experience the growth of extremist parties in the same way as Germany. The **Communist Party** remained small and **Oswald Mosley's British Union of Fascists** made little impact. Most people still supported the traditional parties - Conservative and Labour.

What areas of Britain were Prosperous?

Some parts of Britain were more prosperous than others; these were mainly in the south-east (around London) and parts of the Midlands. Their prosperity was based on new **consumer industries** - cars, washing machines, vacuum cleaners and radios. In 1936, as Britain came out of the Great Depression, London's unemployment rate was only 5 per cent compared to 3 per cent in Wales.

There were signs of prosperity in these areas (in contrast to depressed areas, particularly in the north of England):

- Many more people used electricity than before.
- Even during the Depression, 75 per cent of people had jobs; their **standard of living** rose as prices fell.
- Workers often got holiday pay, so they took more holidays by the seaside.
- There was more leisure time, so more people went to the cinema and dance halls and attended sports meetings.
- More new houses were built with inside toilets.

KEY CONCEPT PROTECTIONISM

Protectionism is the use of tariffs (taxes) to protect home industry and employment from foreign competition. This is the opposite of Free Trade.

BRITAIN AND GERMANY – COMPARISIONS

The British depression was mild compared to that of Germany:

- British unemployment was **half** the German level.
- British banks survived the Depression. Britain also imported a great deal of its food and since food prices fell, those who had jobs were better off.
- Unemployment was less in the **newer industries** - cars, electrical goods - so the areas where these were produced had lower unemployment; London, for example, had only 10 per cent unemployment.
- The high and long-term unemployment of the north of England, south Wales and central Scotland was in contrast to the prosperity of the south-east of England and the Midlands. Unemployment there fell as soon as the economy picked up. Those who had jobs in the 1930s got better off as interest rates and food prices fell (rising standard of living). They increased the demand for electrical and consumer goods.
- The **British recovery** began sooner in 1934 than the German recovery.
- It also began **without rearmament** which was not begun until 1935 and was not significant until 1938.
- Also, the British recovery did not depend on government investment in the economy as the German recovery under Hitler did. Britain continued to balance the budget from 1932 to 1937 and it did not begin the large-scale public works which were used in Germany.

However, even though Britain recovered quickly from the Depression, unemployment remained high - it was still 2.2 million in 1938. This was largely due to the older industries in the depressed areas. These older industries lost 1.3 million workers between 1920 and 1938. In contrast, Hitler's economic plans and rearmament virtually eliminated German unemployment by 1939.

Conclusion

As a result of the economic depression of the 1920s and 1930s, the policy of free trade came to an end and **protectionism** was brought in during the 1930s. The government policy of not intervening in the economy was also questioned. People did not want to experience the bleakness of unemployment again and they demanded that the government take a more active role in ending it. After the Second World War, the policies of **J. M. Keynes**, who advocated government intervention to create full employment, were put into practice. People also demanded that the government take greater care of its citizens, and this led to the creation of the **Welfare State**.

KEY PERSONALITY: JOHN MAYNARD KEYNES

J. M. Keynes was born in Cambridge, England, and educated at Eton and Cambridge. During his life he worked as a civil servant, taught economics at Cambridge and wrote many books and articles.

At the end of the First World War, he was economic adviser to **David Lloyd George, the British Prime Minister**, at the Paris Peace Conference. He disagreed with the Allied treatment of Germany, and published his criticism in ***The Economic Consequences of the Peace***. His belief that reparations were too great a burden on Germany was proven correct.

Keynes was brought up in the economic thinking of the time. This stated that the government should not intervene in the economy. Instead it should balance the budget and not spend money on public works. In a depression, the economy would get itself right - unemployment would lead to a fall in wages and cheaper prices; this would lead to greater demand and a return to employment.

In the 1920s, Keynes **opposed** Britain's return to the Gold Standard at $4.86. He also believed that the government should help the depressed areas where shipbuilding, cotton and coalmining were declining. But Keynes's views had little effect on government policy. Instead, it was the Great Depression which undermined the accepted economic thinking. Economists and politicians were baffled by the Great Depression and could not explain it with their economic theories.

KEY PERSONALITY: JOHN MAYNARD KEYNES

Keynes provided the explanation in his great book, ***The General Theory of Employment, Interest and Money (1936).*** He said the current economic policies would not cure unemployment. This would only be done by the government borrowing money to create public works. The government should also lower interest rates (a cheap money policy).

This began the **Keynesian Revolution** but it was a slow process because many resisted his ideas. Keynes's call for government intervention in the economy was a major break from the free market or laissez-faire economics of the time. However, after the Second World War, governments came to intervene in the economy, and gave commitments to full employment. During the war, Keynes wrote ***How to Pay for the War (1940)*** in which he argued that the war should be funded by higher taxation and compulsory saving rather than by government borrowing. He was also involved in the negotiations which led to the **Bretton-Woods Agreement** which laid out the structure of world finance after the war. However, American influence was too strong and his views were not implemented. But in Britain, Keynes's ideas and the **Beveridge Report (1942)** were the foundation of the **Welfare State** in Britain after the war. This established that the state through its social, economic and educational policies should protect its citizens **from the cradle to the grave**.

CASE STUDY: THE JARROW MARCH, OCTOBER 1936

CASE STUDY: The Jarrow March, October 1936

Introduction

Jarrow, a town in the north-east of England, on the south bank of the river Tyne, was a **depressed town** in the 1920s and 1930s. In the nineteenth and early twentieth century its main industries were iron and steel manufacture and shipbuilding. Its prosperity grew after Charles Mark Palmer established a shipbuilding yard in 1852. Over the next eighty years, **Palmer's Shipbuilding and Iron Company** produced over 1,000 ships. As a result, the town's population grew ten times by the early twentieth century as many Scottish and Irish migrants came to work there.

JARROW AS AN EXAMPLE

Jarrow is an example of the depressed areas of Britain. But many other parts of Britain, especially in the south and Midlands, were based on newer industries and were more prosperous.

SOURCE 1 - NO WORK IN JARROW

'There was no work. No one had a job except a few railwaymen, officials, the workers in the co-operative stores and a few workmen who went out of the town... the plain fact [is] that if people have to live and bear and bring up their children in bad houses on too little food, their resistance to disease is lowered and they die before they should.'

Ellen Wilkinson, The Town That Was Murdered

Decline

After World War I, Palmer's shipyard suffered like other shipyards in Britain. Post-war problems were worsened by the Great Depression from 1929 onwards. In 1931, the steelworks in Jarrow closed down and the town now depended on one shipyard, Palmer's. The last ship was built in 1932, and the yard was taken over by the National Shipbuilders Security Ltd, which had been set up by British shipbuilders to reduce the capacity of the industry. It did this by buying shipyards and closing them down to allow some to survive. In 1934, it closed down and sold off Palmer's. The site was dismantled and no shipbuilding could be carried on in the yard for forty years.

SOURCE 2-POVERTY

'My mother used to keep us in bed in the morning because she couldn't afford to feed us. There was real starvation on Tyneside. It was hard for my parents... I was one of ten children but all of us survived... I went to school in my bare feet... In hot or cold, in winter with six inches of snow, I would get home and my mother would have to rub a towel on my feet to stop me getting frostbite.'

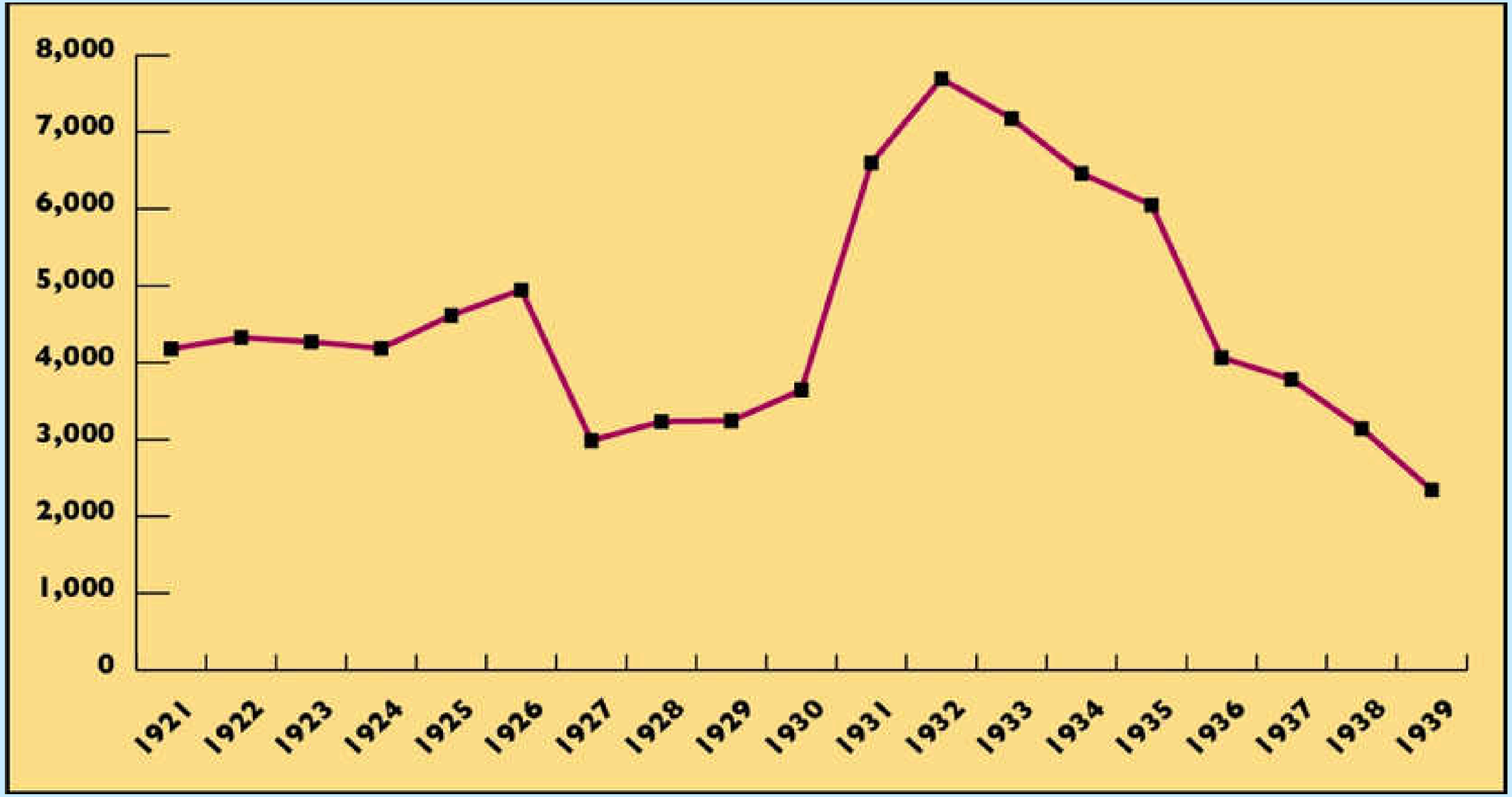
Bill Batty, a Jarrow resident recalling his youth in Jarrow

SOURCE 3 - JARROW IS A DERELICT TOWN

'Now Jarrow is a derelict town. I have seen nothing like it since the war. There is no escape anywhere from its prevailing misery, for it is entirely a working-class town. One little street may be rather more wretched than another, but to the outsider they all look alike. One out of two shops appeared to be permanently closed. Wherever we went there were men hanging about, not scores of them but hundreds and thousands of them. The whole town looked as if it entered a perpetual penniless bleak Sabbath.'

J.B. Priestley, The English Journey, 1934

SOURCE 4 – UNEMPLOYMENT FIGURES FOR JARROW, 1921-39



Decline

As the Mayor of Jarrow said, 'Jarrow is like a man who has lost both his arms. First we lost the Steelworks and 3,000 men lost their jobs. Then we lost our Shipyard and another 5,000 were out of work. No town can stand such crippling blows.'

Unemployment in Jarrow varied between 41 per cent in 1922 to 72 per cent in 1932, compared to 15 per cent in the country. Of 8,000 skilled workers in steel manufacture and shipbuilding, only 100 were employed. The increased unemployment added to the existing problems of a depressed area - poverty, over-crowding, poor housing and high mortality (See Sources 1, 2, 3 and 5).

Jarrow made efforts to attract new industry. A proposal to build a new steelworks in Jarrow using modern cost-effective techniques was blocked by the British Iron and Steel Federation. The BISF established a **cartel** (monopoly) in the steel industry which was now protected by tariffs under the Import Duties Act of 1932. Later, a deputation from Jarrow met Walter Runciman, the President of the Board of Trade. He told them that Jarrow must **work out its own salvation**. Arising from the disappointment of the steelworks project and Runciman's rejection, it was decided that Jarrow would petition the government.

Organisation of the Crusade

On 20 July 1936, **Jarrow Borough Council** decided to organise a march to present a petition to Parliament in London. A letter from Jarrow to the Ministry of Labour explained (5 October 1936): 'A March has been organised for the purpose of drawing the attention of the Government to the Unemployment position in the town, and in the hope that by this means the position of Jarrow will obtain wide publicity and sympathy of the general public resulting in the establishment of industry to provide work for unemployed men.'

There was considerable **planning** needed for the march so a March Committee was set up to plan the route. Stops along the 300-mile journey were decided upon, and 200 men were selected for the march, after medical examination. The Council raised £1,500 to fund the march, including pocket money for the men, and their train fare back from London.

The Labour-dominated Council also ensured **cross-party support** for the march, including support from the local Conservative Party. The Council did not want the march to be linked to the hunger marches organised by the National Unemployed Workers' Movement (NUWM), who had connections with the Communist Party. They also called it a **crusade** rather than a march - partly to reflect the religious background of the area, but also to distance it from the hunger marches. (See Source 6 - Organisation of march).

The Progress of the Crusade

There were 11,000 Jarrow people who signed the petition, which the marchers were carrying to London in an oak box with gold lettering. Over 68,000 Tyneside people signed a further petition: 'your petitioners humbly and anxiously pray that H.M. Government realise the urgent need that work be provided for the town without further devastating delay.' (See Source 5 Jarrow petition).

The marchers set off from the Town Hall, watched by most of the townspeople. They were led at the start by the Mayor, local councillors and **Ellen Wilkinson**, Labour Member of Parliament for Jarrow, who had encouraged the organisation of the march. They carried large banners saying **Jarrow Crusade**.

SOURCE 5 - JARROW PETITION

'To: The Honourable the Commons of the United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland in Parliament Assembled. The humble petition of the inhabitants of the Borough of Jarrow sheweth as follows: During the last fifteen years Jarrow has passed through a period of industrial depression without parallel in the town's history. The persistence of unemployment has reduced us to a deplorable condition homes are impoverished and acute distress is prevalent... your petitioners humbly and anxiously pray that H.M. Government realise the urgent need that work be provided for the town without further devastating delay, actively assist resuscitation [revival] of industry and render such other actions s may be meet. Signed by the under-mentioned, being inhabitants of the town of Jarrow of the age of 18 years and over."

D Dougan, Jarrow March, 1936

SOURCE 6-ORGANISATION OF MARCH

'The organisation seems well nigh perfect. includes a transport wagon a bus bought for £20 and converted - which goes ahead with the sleeping kit, waterproofs for every man wom bandoleer fashion, 1s 6d pocket-money and two 1d stamps a week, medical attention, haircutting (and shaving for the inexpert), cobbling, accommodation at night in drill halls, schools, church institutes, and even town halls, and advance agents the persons of the Labour agent at Jarrow, Mr. Harry Stoddart, and the Conservative agent, Mr. R Suddick, who work together in arranging accommodation and getting halls for meetings.'

With the Jarrow Marchers in the Manchester Guardian, 13 October 1936

SOURCE 7 - SUPPORT OF MARCH

'There is no political aspect to this march. It is simply the town of Jarrow saying "Send us work". In the ranks of the marchers are Labour men, Liberals, Tories (Conservatives), and one or two Communists, but you cannot tell who's who.'

With the Jarrow Marchers in the Manchester Guardian, 13 October 1936

SOURCE 8 - NOT A HUNGER MARCH

'With eggs and salmon and such sandwiches as I saw today being consumed on the menu it is emphatically not a hunger-march. The men are doing well on it, and only two of them have fallen out for reasons of health in nearly 90 miles of marching.'

With the Jarrow Marchers in the Manchester Guardian, 13 October 1936

The Progress of the Crusade

Each day followed a **similar pattern**. They began around 8.45 a.m. and marched an average of 13 miles a day. Some marched army-style - 50 minutes marching and 10 minutes resting. They marched in all conditions, though they were fortunate that there were only a few days of rain along the route. Sometimes they broke the monotony by singing, led by their mouth organ band. During the day, they were fed from their transport wagon. At the end of a day's marching, they were usually warmly welcomed - and fed in the towns where they stopped. The leaders presented the case of Jarrow at public meetings in the towns. (See Sources 7, 8, 9 and 10).

Along the way, many people praised the organisation of the march and the conduct of the men. In Barnsley, for example, the Mayor said, 'Everything that Barnsley can do for you will be done.' Apart from a hot meal of meat and potato pie, pudding and tea or coffee, some men took advantage of free seats at the cinema and others got a free drink in the local pubs. (See also Source 9 - Welcome at Harrogate).

At end of each day's marching, the leaders' speeches followed **consistent themes**: the causes of Jarrow's unemployment problems, the impact of unemployment on the town and a call on the government to provide jobs for the town. (See Source 10 - Speeches on the march).

SOURCE 9 - WELCOME AT HARROGATE

'Harrogate welcomed the Jarrow marchers today as cheerfully as if they were a relief column raising a siege. The music of the mouth-organ band might have been that of the bagpipes so surely did it bring the people flocking, and when the two hundred reached the Concert Rooms there were hundreds of folk drawn up on the slopes around to cheer them. The police were in attendance and there was a big banner raised saying, "Harrogate workers welcome the Jarrow marchers". At the Drill Hall, the headquarters for the night, the crowd was denser... A meeting is to be held at the Winter Gardens with Miss Ellen Wilkinson as one of the speakers. At every stopping-place there is such a meeting so that the world should know of Jarrow."

With the Jarrow marchers in the Manchester Guardian, 13 October 1936

Ellen Wilkinson M.P.

One of the key speakers and leaders was local Labour M.P., Ellen Wilkinson. Known also as '**Red Ellen**', she was a former member of the Communist Party. She walked most of the way with the men, except when she attended the Labour Party conference in Edinburgh where she presented the men's case. She also attacked the National Executive of the Labour Party and the National Council of Labour which had failed to support the March. So also did the Trades Union Congress (TUC) which feared the March would be infiltrated by Communists.

Wilkinson also replied to the local Bishop of Durham, Dr Henson, who criticised the marchers' 'revolutionary policy' and said they used 'the method of organised mob pressure'. She responded by saying, 'All legal methods in and out of Parliament have been tried... For the Bishop of Durham to stigmatise as "revolutionary" the quiet exercise of our constitutional right to offer a petition to Parliament is dangerous in these days.'

SOURCE 10-SPEECHES ON THE MARCH

'There were four main speakers. Alderman Thompson (Mayor) spoke about Jarrow's plight in general. "First we lost the Steelworks and 3,000 men lost their jobs. Then we lost our shipyard and another 5,000 were out of work." Councillor David Riley developed the economic theme. Poor towns like Jarrow had to subsidise their own poverty because a higher rate (local tax) had to be levied to cover substantial unemployment benefits that were being paid out. The third speaker, Councillor Paddy Scullion, dealt with the impact of unemployment on the health of the community. Finally, Ellen Wilkinson, the town's Member of Parliament, spoke. She concentrated her attack on the complacency-or cruelty of the Government and the inertia of its leaders."

D. Dougan, Jarrow March, 1936

Government View

While the March was in progress, the Government made its views known about the Jarrow March (and others that were in progress at the same time). 'The British Cabinet has chosen the same moment to announce these marches on London are "altogether undesirable"... The country is governed by a parliamentary system which allows every area to put forward its grievances through its elected members, and "processions to London cannot claim to have any constitutional influence on policy". (The Irish Times, 16 October 1936). The men rejected these views and continued their march.

London and Home

After twenty-three days marching and two weekend rests, they reached London on Saturday, 31 October. They were led into the city by Ellen Wilkinson, by Jarrow's Mayor, eleven councillors and a Labrador mascot dog.

But their crusade made **little immediate impact** on those in power. The marchers held a demonstration in Hyde Park on 1 November but there were only 3,000 to 5,000 in attendance, compared to 250,000 some days later for a National Hunger March.

Their M.P., Ellen Wilkinson, presented the Jarrow petition to Parliament on 4 November but the Prime Minister, Stanley Baldwin, refused to meet a delegation of marchers. (See Source 13 - Petition to Parliament).

The men were disappointed with the whole process: 'We got turned down. We got a cup of tea, they gave us a cup of tea. When we got turned down in the House of Commons, that was it... You knew you were finished."

The marchers returned to Jarrow by train. They were welcomed by cheering and shouting crowds; 'Never before in the history of the town has there been such an exhibition of mass enthusiasm,' reported the North Mail.

The next day they got a shock when the Unemployment Assistance Board reduced their unemployment benefit by between four and 11 shillings a week - because they had not been available for work.

SOURCE 11

Jarrow marchers playing the harmonica.

SOURCE 12-OPPOSITION TO THE MARCH

..the Labour Party Conference in Edinburgh rebuked Ellen Wilkinson for organising the march, on the grounds that hunger marches with Communist associated organisations, such as the NUWM, and their use might lead to disorder...'

Stevenson and Cook, The Slump. Society and Politics during the Depression

SOURCE 13 - PETITION TO PARLIAMENT

'The presentation of petitions was followed by a question from Ellen Wilkinson to the Prime Minister, Mr. Stanley Baldwin, asking how many resolutions he had received since 1 July regarding the position of Jarrow. He replied that he had received 66 resolutions, eight letters, one telegram and five postcards. And that was that.. It seemed such a let- down... They [the men] had expected something more dramatic, a debate, a discussion, a statement, but they were left with nothing."

D. Dougan, Jarrow March 1936

Assessment

The Jarrow March or Crusade achieved its **first aim** of presenting a petition to Parliament. In contrast to other similar marches, it didn't alienate the general public. Instead it achieved a certain fame through its organised and orderly manner. Indeed, in recent decades the symbolism of the Jarrow Crusade has been used for propaganda purposes, often by those who were opposed to it at the time, such as the Labour Party and the TUC.

Jarrow Council proposed a bill which would allow the council to create new industries. Even though the bill eventually became law in 1939, it did little to help the town's unemployment problems.

The March failed in its **main aim** of getting the government to provide jobs for the area. Jarrow's economy improved in the next few years but this had little to do with the crusade. Instead private industry, partly driven by rearmament as the Second World War approached, gradually filled the gap for the unemployed of Jarrow.

In 1938, a ship-breaking yard and engineering works were set up, and a year later a steelworks. There was also a tube factory established in part of the old Palmer's site which produced casings for shells and bullets. The approach of the Second World War also gave a boost to shipbuilding in other areas along the Tyne.

SOURCE 14 - ARRIVAL OF THE JARROW MARCHERS IN LONDON

However, the Jarrow Crusade had an impact beyond the confines of the town. Along with the other hunger marches, it sparked the conscience of the middle classes. The march, more than any of the other. marches, symbolised the despair of unemployed men and depressed areas. As the (London) Times said, 'The Jarrow march is, indeed, a symbol of the feeling of neglect and unmerited poverty and dependence which pervades the distressed areas.'

(Quoted in The Irish Times, 27 October 1936)

Assessment

However, the Jarrow Crusade had an impact beyond the confines of the town. Along with the other hunger marches, it sparked the conscience of the middle classes. The march, more than any of the other marches, symbolised the **despair** of unemployed men and depressed areas. As the (London) Times said, *'The Jarrow march is, indeed, a symbol of the feeling of neglect and unmerited poverty and dependence which pervades the distressed areas.'* (Quoted in The Irish Times, 27 October 1936)

The effect of mass unemployment in the 1920s and 1930s contributed to the setting up of the **Welfare State** in Britain after the Second World War. *'The legacy of bitterness and suffering caused by mass unemployment helped spur the creation of the Welfare State.'* (Stevenson and Cook, The Slump. Society and Politics during the Depression)

During the Second World War, the British government published the **Beveridge Report**. The report attacked the five 'giant evils' of illness, ignorance, disease, squalor and want. It recommended a minimum standard of living *'below which no one should be allowed to fall'.* The report became the basis of the Welfare State, which introduced reforms in social welfare, health and education to provide for people 'from the cradle to the grave'.

WEB RESOURCES

- Jarrow March - http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Jarrow_March
- Jarrow - http://www.bbc.co.uk/history/british/britain_wwone/jarow_01.shtml
- With the Jarrow marchers - http://century.guardian.co.uk/1930-1939/Story/0,6051,127027,00.html
- The Depression of the 1930s - http://www.bbc.co.uk/schools/gcsebitesize/history/mwh/britain/depressionrev1.shtml
- Ellen Wilkinson - http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Ellen_Wilkinso
- Ellen Wilkinson - http://spartacus-educational.com/TUwilkinson.htm