**Task 1 - (see resources below)**

Write an essay on the following topic: How far was the political landscape in the period 1918 to 1939 transformed by the Representation of the People Act 1918?

**(Total 20 marks)**

You should write your essay in continuous prose.

Your essay will be marked for its:

* Analytical focus
* Accurate detail
* Supported judgement
* Argument and structure

Please see the mark scheme below:

|  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- |
| **Level** | **Marks** | **Description** |
| 1 | 1-3 | * Simplistic statements. * Very limited accurate and relevant knowledge. * There is either no overall judgement, or it is very basic. * Very little structure or argument. |
| 2 | 4-7 | * Descriptive statements about key features. * Mostly accurate and relevant knowledge, but limited in terms of range and depth. * An overall judgement is presented but with limited support. The judgement lacks clear criteria. * The work shows the beginnings of structure and a limited attempt to create an argument. |
| 3 | 8-12 | * Some analysis of key features. * Mostly accurate and relevant knowledge is used in a way that shows some understanding of the question. The range and depth may be limited in places. * An overall judgement is presented. It is supported with an attempt to establish criteria. * Some structure and a generally clear argument. |
| 4 | 13-16 | * Analysis of key features. * Sufficient accurate and relevant knowledge is used to answer most aspects of the question. * An overall judgement is presented. It is based on valid criteria but may only be partially supported. * A well-structured essay with a clear argument, although in places the argument may lack precision. |
| 5 | 17-20 | * Sustained analysis of key features. * Sufficient accurate and relevant knowledge is used to answer all key aspects of the question. * An overall judgement is presented. It is based on valid criteria, and is fully supported. The relative significance of the criteria may be considered whilst reaching the judgement. * A well-structured essay with a clear argument which is communicated with precision. |

**Hints**

1. What was the Representation of the People Act 1918 and how did it change the political landscape?
2. What was the political situation like in 1918?
3. How had the political situation changed by 1939?
4. What else/ other factors changed the political landscape – Rise of Labour, split in the Liberal party (Asquith vs Lloyd George), the Campbell affair and the Zinoviev letter
5. Make sure you stick to the time period – 1918-39

**A changing political and economic environment, 1918-1979**

**Britain in 1918**

The First World War ended in November 1918. Britain had lost over 750,000 men, with 2,273,000 wounded, and owed £1billion, mainly to the USA. The war had a huge impact on the political, economic and social landscape and would significantly influence post-war developments.

**Political effects**

Britain in 1918 was governed by a wartime **coalition** of Liberals and Conservatives, led by **David Lloyd George.** There had not been a general election since 1910, so the biggest question was whether the coalition would continue. A new election was scheduled for December 1918.

**Representation of the People Act**

The Representation of the People Act, passed in February 1918 had trebled the electorate from 7.7 million to 21.4 million out of a total population of approximately 41.6 million:

* All women over the age of 30 had been given the right to vote – over 8 million in number.
* All men previously unfranchised were given the vote – about 6 million in total.

**Political Parties**

**Conservatives**

The Conservative Party had widened its appeal during the previous century as the party mainly of the middle and upper classes but with a substantial working-class vote – possibly as many as 25 per cent of the working classes voted Conservative. It had been part of the wartime coalition formed by Liberal Prime Minister Herbert Asquith since 1915. However, as a result of electoral success in the 1918 and 1922 elections, many Conservatives felt the party was strong enough to govern independently.

**Liberals**

While Lloyd George had led the wartime coalition from 1916, the Liberal Party itself was deeply divided for various reasons:

* Lloyd George was the Prime Minister and leader of those Liberals who supported the coalition while Asquith remained official leader of the party itself.
* Many opposed the manner in which Lloyd George had defeated Asquith as Prime Minister in 1916, which they saw as devious and underhand. The result was a split in the party between supporters of Lloyd George and Asquith. Asquith remained leader of the party itself until October 1926, when Lloyd George took over.
* Supporters of Asquith felt Lloyd George’s wing of the party had become too close to the Conservatives in policy. In particular, they had opposed conscription during the war.

**Labour**

The Labour Party had been created in the late nineteenth century to represent the interests of the **trade union movement**, from which it received most of its finance. The trade unions saw the Labour Party as the means by which workers’ pay and conditions could be improved through the work of Labour MPs in parliament.

The Labour Party was expected to gain more MPs through the growth of the electorate.

**1918 election**

The election saw an overwhelming victory for the wartime coalition – Conservatives and pro-coalition Liberals won 459 seats, with ten other MPs supporting them. The largest single opposition party was Labour, with 57 MPs.

The new government, however, faced significant problems.

**Maintaining unity**

The Conservatives held most seats among coalition supporters – at least 332. Clearly Lloyd George was dependent on their support, which could be withdrawn if they wished to form a government of their own.

In addition, many Conservatives disliked Lloyd George’s use of the **honours system** by which he openly sold peerages and knighthoods to wealthy supporters to keep the Liberals in power.

**Changing party fortunes, 1918-1931**

The main reason for the Conservative bringing down the wartime coalition was because they no longer needed Lloyd George. They felt strong enough to win elections and govern on their own.

**Impact of the 1922 election**

The election of November 1922 saw the Conservatives win an overall majority. However, it was the other two major parties for which the results were significant.

**Labour Party**

The Labour Party won 142 seats and supplanted the Liberals as the official opposition. The party indeed was to form two governments in the period of 1924 to 1931 and show their fitness to govern.

**Liberals**

The 1920s saw a dramatic decline in the fortunes of the Liberal Party, which never again took power and was effectively marginalized in British politics. Historians have argued that the decline pre-dated the First World War. However, there are various reasons for its collapse:

* It was supplanted by the Labour Party as the voice of the working classes, particularly after the 1928 Representation of the People Act.
* It did not recover from the split as a result of the wartime coalition. During the 1920s its MPs were always divided into those supporting Lloyd George or Asquith and his successors.

**Conservatives**

The Conservatives saw themselves as the natural party of government, adjusting to changing circumstances and embracing all groups. During the 1920s, their motto was ‘Safety First’, as exemplified by their leader **Stanley Baldwin**, who offered a reassuring presence and gave an aura of confidence, for example during the 1926 **General Strike** (see page 20).

**First Labour administration, January to October 1924**

The first Labour government was a minority administration needing Liberal support. Although it was moderate in its goals, problems manifested themselves.

* Labour found it difficult to break with the perception that it was specifically a party representing the interests for the industrial working classes. As its major paymaster, the Trades Union Congress (TUC) expected support in industrial disputes. However, during a London transport workers’ strike in March 1924, Prime Minister Ramsay MacDonald declared a state of emergency and was prepared to bring in troops to move essential supplies. Many trade unionists felt betrayed by MacDonald and by Labour.
* Labour found it difficult to win trust. More conservative elements in society believed the Labour Party and many of its supporters to be covert revolutionaries. The government fell as a result of the Campbell affair. Although a relatively minor issue, this highlighted this lack of trust.

**The Campbell affair and the Zinoviev letter**

A Communist magazine editor, J.R. Campbell, was accused of incitement to mutiny in one of his articles. When the Labour Attorney General withdrew the charges, Liberals accused the government of being pro-revolution, and withdrew their support. The Labour government resigned.

Shortly afterwards the conservative-supporting newspaper, the *Daily Mail* published a letter purporting to come from a leading Russian Communist, Zinoviev, advising the Communist Party how to effect a revolution in Britain. Although subsequently show to be a hoax it did irreparable damage to the Labour Party in the election campaign

**Second Labour administration, 1929-31**

The second Labour administration, again a minority government, was dominated by economic crisis which saw unemployment double and foreign investors lose confidence in the British economy. In the face of the extent of the crisis, MacDonald entered into a coalition with the Conservatives in 1931, forming the **National Government**. This decision split the Labour Party through the 1930s.

**The National Government, 1931-45**

The National Government, born out of economic crisis, continued until the end of the Second World War. Although a coalition, it was dominated by Conservatives and, until 1940, Conservatives controlled most ministerial positions.

**Policies**

The biggest challenge during this period was to combat the economic depression. The government implemented severe spending cuts (see page 14) and introduced **tariffs** which it was hoped would protect domestic industry. However, its policies generally were conservative and limited in scope.

**Tariffs**

The Import Duties Act 1932 introduced a ten per cent tariff on most imports. Attempts to develop Imperial Preference (special trading agreements with countries in the British Empire) had only limited success.

**Interest rates**

The bank rate was reduced from six to two per cent. This helped stimulate recovery by reducing interest rates on borrowing.

**The unemployed**

The Unemployment Act 1934 introduced a **‘means test’** (see page 30) for those whose **unemployment insurance** had run out. While most workers were covered by the 1920 Unemployment Insurance Act, benefits lasted for only 15 weeks per year.

**Depressed areas**

The Special Areas Act 1934 introduced grants to try to stimulate industrial growth in depressed areas (see page 14).

**Table 1.1 National Government Prime Ministers**

|  |  |
| --- | --- |
| **Year** | **Prime Minister** |
| 1931 | Ramsay MacDonald (retired 1935) |
| 1932-37 | Stanley Baldwin (retired 1937) |
| 1937-40 | Neville Chamberlain (resigned 1940) |
| 1940-45 | Winston Churchill (defeated in 1945 general election) |

**Public Order**

In face of threats from extremist groups, the government passed the Public Order Act 1936, banning inflammatory political meetings and the wearing of military-style uniforms.

**Rearmament**

In the face of the increasingly tense international situation, the government began a policy of rearmament in the later 1930s. This helped to ease the economic difficulties of the 1930s.

These measures had some success as unemployment slowly fell, although it was not until the first year of war that it fell to below 1 million, in large part as a result of conscription.

**Extremist measures**

Many political extremists favoured more radical measures both to combat the Depression and change British society. On the left Communists were calling for a Russian-style revolution. Many of the right supported **fascism**. In 1932 for example the British Union of Fascists (BUF) was formed by Sir Oswald Mosley. At its height it had 50,000 members.

**Wartime government**

The National Government continued during wartime. Its leader, **Neville Chamberlain,** who had tried tirelessly to appease the German dictator Adolf Hitler, was unsuccessful as a war leader. Following the failure of the British effort to defeat the enemy in Norway, he was replaced by **Winston Churchill.**

**Total war**

During the war years, the government controlled most aspects of everyday life, with the whole country being placed on a war footing. This meant conscription, centralized economic planning, censorship, rationing of food and other essential items. People generally accepted this as necessary for victory, and the groundwork was set for continued government involvement in people’s everyday lives in the post-war years.