

# Britain Transformed, 1918-1997

## Task 1: What was the political impact of the First World War?

Year	Prime Minister	Party / parties
August 1914 - May 1915	H. H. Asquith (Liberal)	Liberal (+ Irish Nationalist support)
May 1915 - Dec 1916	H. H. Asquith (Liberal)	Liberal / Conservative Coalition
Dec 1916 - Nov 1918	D. Lloyd George (Liberal)	Liberal / Conservative Coalition

**Table 1. Wartime governments**

### Section 1: 1914-15

#### **Asquith's Liberal government, 1914-1915**

*What was the impact of the war on British politics, the role of the state, and the Liberal Party?*

The First World War had a profound impact on British politics in general and the Liberal Party in particular. The war became a 'total war' which necessitated an unprecedented extension of State authority and control; the war was thus a serious challenge to traditional Liberal values of personal freedoms, peace, and free-trade.

Despite their traditional opposition to war, the Liberal government had little choice but to enter war against Germany in 1914; their traditional anti-war feelings had to be replaced by patriotism and their belief in only limited state intervention had to be abandoned.

In 1914 the Liberal government passed 'The Defence of the Realm Act' which dramatically enhanced the power and authority of the State.

Many Liberals hoped that Lloyd George, the Chancellor, might lead an anti-war faction within the Liberal government. He soon disappointed them. Once Britain had entered war his commitment to the war effort was total.

Furthermore, at the outbreak of war, a 'political truce' was called between the political parties who agreed to put aside their differences and work together for the war effort.

The war had therefore had two important consequences for politics: firstly, the Liberal Party had (through necessity) abandoned their old ideological values, and secondly, a new era of 'consensus politics' – in which the parties worked more closely together – was about to begin.

#### **Lloyd George as wartime chancellor**

*What were some of the key measures introduced by Lloyd George?*

## **Section 2: 1915-16**

### **The Asquith Coalition (1915)**

*Why was a new coalition formed in May 1915?*

*How did Andrew Bonar Law and the Conservative Party benefit from this coalition?*

*Why were many Liberals not happy with this new coalition?*

### **Lloyd George as Minister for Munitions**

*What was Lloyd George's new contribution to the war effort? (Munitions and conscription)*

### **Section 3: 1916**

#### **Lloyd George as Minister for War**

*How did Lloyd George become the Minister for War?*

By 1916 Lloyd George was depressed; he felt that the military leaders of the British Army were incompetent and were using the wrong tactics on the Western Front. Lloyd George came close to resigning, however, the death of Lord Kitchener (Minister for War) in 1916 led to a dramatic turn of events.

Lloyd George became the Minister for War just five days after the start of the Battle of the Somme, the most costly single campaign ever fought by the British Army. The Battle of the Somme was a disaster and hugely increased the tension between Lloyd George and the Army leaders.

#### **The removal of Asquith**

*How did Lloyd George engineer the removal of H. H. Asquith?*

*Why was the overthrow of Asquith significant*

## Section 4: 1916-18

### Lloyd George as Prime Minister

*'The man who won the war'*

After 1918, Lloyd George was frequently referred to as 'the man who won the war' due to his extraordinary leadership. In 1916 Britain was in a desperate situation: British morale was at an all-time low, the German U-boat campaign had sunk British ships and destroyed valuable food and resources, and by 1917 the risk of starvation was very real.

Many MPs began to discuss the possibility of a compromised peace with Germany and defeatism was in the air. It was Lloyd George, with his absolute refusal to even contemplate defeat, who was able to inspire his colleagues, put heart into the nation, and solve the problems of shortages and hunger.

### Lloyd George's political methods as Prime Minister

*In what ways did Lloyd George abandon traditional parliamentary democracy?*

- *Changes to the make-up of the Cabinet*

- *The formation of a 'war cabinet'*

- *Presidential-style government*

### The challenge to Lloyd George

*Why did Asquith attempt a vote of no confidence in Lloyd George?*

*What was the result of the vote?*

*What was the impact of this on the Liberal Party?*

## Section 5:

### The 'Coupon Election' – the General Election of 1918

*Why was the 1918 election so important?*

At the end of the war in November 1918, Lloyd George (Liberal) and Andrew Bonar Law (Conservative) agreed to continue their coalition into peacetime.

This decision outraged many Liberals (particularly the 'Asquithian Liberals' who supported H. H. Asquith) as they did not want the Liberal Party to continue working with the Conservatives now that the war was over. These 'Asquithian Liberals' ran in the 1918 election as a separate party from David Lloyd George's 'Coalition Liberals'.

The 'Coalition Liberals' and 'Coalition Conservatives' won an easy victory in 1918, however, it was clear that the Conservatives were by far the largest political party and the Liberals were divided beyond repair. Leading historian, Kenneth Morgan, has stated that the 1918 election was, 'the greatest of disasters for the Liberal Party and the greatest of tragedies for Lloyd George'.

Party	Seats won	Vote (per cent)
<b>Coalition Conservatives</b>	<b>335</b>	<b>32.6</b>
<b>Coalition Liberals</b>	<b>133</b>	<b>13.5</b>
<b>Coalition Labour</b>	<b>10</b>	<b>1.5</b>
Labour	63	22.2
Asquithian Liberals	28	12.1
Conservatives	23	3.4
Irish Nationalists	7	2.2
Sinn Fein	73	4.5

**Table 2. 1918 election results**

**Task 2: What was the overall impact of the war on the political parties?**

**The Liberal Party**

**The Conservative Party**

**The Labour Party**

