

# Knowledge Organiser: Depression, war and recovery 1930-1951 (Unit 1)

## Key Question 2: How were people able to cope with the challenges of the Depression years?

### Timeline of events

1920: Unemployment Insurance Act
29 October 1929: Wall Street Crash
1931: The Means Test introduced
1935: First Welsh language 'talkie' in cinemas
October 1936: The Jarrow Hunger March
1937: Boxing match between Tommy Farr and Joe Louis

### Important concept

1930s Britain is usually referred to as 'the hungry thirties'. In areas where traditional, heavy industries had dominated, it became a time of mass unemployment, dole queues and hunger marches. However, this was not the case throughout Britain. Many areas thrived, with new, lighter industries developing and new methods of production creating millions of jobs. Many people enjoyed shorter working hours, higher wages, and even holidays in places such as Butlins.

### Key words

<b>Depression</b>	A long-term downturn in economic activity.
<b>Coalition Government</b>	A government in which several political parties work together.
<b>National Government</b>	A government in which several political parties work together.
<b>Dole</b>	Money paid out by the government to the unemployed.
<b>Means Test</b>	Checks to see if an individual or family was eligible for the dole.
<b>Trade Union</b>	Association of workers who try to gain better working conditions and pay.
<b>Hunger March</b>	Protest marches to highlight the problems caused by unemployment, such as poverty and hunger.
<b>Hire Purchase</b>	A system where a person pays for goods or services in instalments over a period of time.

### Light Industries

- New industries developed, such as car production, aviation, chemical industries and electrical goods. These were powered by electricity, a cheap and efficient power source, and used mass production techniques in order to produce goods quickly and cheaply.
- Advertising encouraged customers, and offered opportunities to purchase goods on hire purchase.

### The dole and the Means Test

- The Unemployment Insurance Act of 1920 had provided some financial support to workers who became unemployed for up to 39 weeks. This was referred to as 'the dole'.
- When the Depression hit Britain, the dole was cut by 10% and the National Government introduced the Means Test for those unemployed for more than six months.
- People had their houses inspected to check all their possessions and their savings. Families could be forced to sell possessions before they could claim the dole.
- People hated the Means Test and there were many protests against it. In 1932, two people died in clashes with police in Rochdale and Belfast.
- From 1934 onwards, the dole and the Means Test were managed by the Unemployment Assistance Boards (UAB).

### Hunger marches

- People in areas of great depression felt that the government were doing very little to help them. They organised hunger marches, so that issues such as unemployment, poverty and hunger could be highlighted to the government.
- The most famous hunger march was the Jarrow Crusade. In Jarrow over 75% of the population was unemployed due to the closure of the shipyards. In 1936, 200 men, along with their MP, Ellen Wilkinson, walked 300 miles from Jarrow to London, to present a petition requesting jobs for Jarrow to the government. It took them 8 months, but saw no government action or assistance.
- The Depression hit South Wales very hard. On 14 October 1932, 375 marchers set off from the Rhondda, heading for London. They wanted to present the government with a petition to abolish the Means Test, end cuts to social services and end the 10% reduction in dole payments. The Metropolitan Police confiscated the petition and it was not delivered to Parliament.
- Further protests took place in Wales in 1935, and in Merthyr Tydfil the UAB offices were attacked by women. In 1936 a hunger march from South Wales to London took place, but like the Jarrow Crusade, it achieved little.

### Special Areas Acts

- The Special Areas Act of 1934 appointed government officials to oversee four 'special' areas – north-east and north-west England, Clydeside, South Wales and Northern Ireland. A grant of £2 million was available to companies who would relocate to these areas and create jobs.
- In 1936, a further act offered incentives such as rent, rates and tax reductions.
- The Treforest Industrial Estate opened in 1936, but by 1939 only 2,500 workers were employed there.
- A new steelworks was opened at Ebbw Vale in 1938.
- By 1938, over £8 million had been spent, but only an estimated 14,900 new jobs had been created.

### 'Making ends meet' and 'self-help'

- In many areas hit hard by the Depression, women often suffered most. They went without food so that their families could eat, and neglected their own health and well-being.
- Families had to survive by 'making ends meet'. They bought cheaper food, such as potatoes, bread and margarine, but this led to poor health and malnutrition.
- Women looked for any work that they could do in order to supplement the families' income. They repaired clothes, worked as domestic servants or shop assistants, but this often resulted in less dole money due to the Means Test.
- Communities often came together to help each other in times of need.

### Emigration from Wales

- Thousands of unemployed workers and their families moved from Wales to the more prosperous or less affected areas, such as the Midlands and south-east England.
- The Ministry of Labour established a scheme to find work for Welsh workers.
- Many found jobs in the new industries, such as building cars in the Morris Factory in Oxford.
- Sometimes, Welsh families were not welcomed into their new communities as they were willing to work for less money.
- Approximately 430,000 people left Wales during the 1920s and 1930s.

### Popular entertainment

- In order to escape the effects of the Depression, popular entertainment, such as the radio and cinema, offered an escape and helped to raise morale.
- Mass production ensured that most families could afford a radio. The BBC offered news programmes, live theatre, music and comedy.
- The most popular form of entertainment was the cinema. Admission prices were low, and they were often places of great comfort and warmth. They showed American films and made stars out of their actors.
- By the end of the decade there were around 4,780 cinemas in Britain.
- In Wales, rugby, football and boxing were very popular. The working classes, in particular, saw in boxing a way to escape from their daily lives of poverty and unemployment. Tommy Farr, from the Rhondda, became a sporting hero by defeating American Joe Louis in 1938.