

## Case Study: Jarrow March

### Situation in Jarrow:

- Unemployment benefit reluctantly given (subject to means test) and was totally inadequate
- Conditions:
  - 70% unemployment
  - Town's main employer, a shipyard, had shut down the previous year
  - Poverty, poor housing, overcrowding, high mortality rates, highest infant mortality rates in the country
- 'Special Areas':
  - Although general economy was improving, traditional industrial areas had high unemployment
  - Bad areas declared 'Special Areas' and given extra help – did little
- Cause of march:
  - They wanted government to recognise and help tackle their hardships, and introduce a steelworks into the town
  - Many people had been protesting about poverty since Great Depression
  - Jarrow March was to present a petition to parliament

### The march itself:

- Called it a crusade to highlight gravity, and to distinguish from communist marches
- Preparation:
  - Religious service held on eve of departure
  - Second-hand bus bought
  - Advance guard sent to arrange overnight stops and public meetings
- The march:
  - 200 men marched 300 miles to London – 10 to 15 miles a day
  - Started on 5<sup>th</sup> October 1936
  - Petition signed by 11,000 people from Jarrow, and more from on the way to London
  - At every public meeting, the mayor J. W. Thompson and 'Red' Ellen Wilkinson spoke
  - March widely covered in press, very positively
  - A lot of support – got donation at Leeds to pay for train home, were cheered in Harrogate
- Arrival in London:
  - PM Stanley Baldwin refused to see them, saying he was too busy
  - Delegates from protest (Wilkinson + Thompson) addressed MPs expressing distaste

### Effects of march:

- No response to march itself, but government's policies did improve
  - Taxes on imports
  - Ship-breaking yard, engineering works, and steelworks set up in Jarrow
- March was a symbol of human consequences of mass unemployment
- Raised awareness

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### **Was it a reflection of Britain in 1930s?**

- Overall, Britain was actually richer than ever
- While traditional areas were declining (shipbuilding, coalmining), new industries growing (car manufacturing, electricity, professional and clerical)
- National income rose by 20% between 1932 and 1937, average weekly income doubled between 1913 and 1938
- Fall in prices, especially food
- Mass culture developed – more and cheaper pastimes