

Assess the extent to which the Wilson government achieved

Government



Assess the extent to which the Wilson Government achieved its objectives by 1970 To assess the Wilson Government which ran from the years 1964 to 1970 you have to look at what the Labour government promised to achieve if they won the election in 1964. You have to look at what the changes the Wilson government brought forward in their time in office and how the personalities of its politician's effects decisions made. The election campaign in 1964 was a close run contest even though there was a low public approval of the current Prime Minister Alec Douglas-Home.

The labour party only won a majority of 3 seats. The reason for the decline in support for the Conservative party was because of events and scandals such as the Profumo affair in 1963. Looking at Labour in the run up to the General Election, they promoted themselves with a more modern youthful image that was more in tune with the times rather than the aristocratic feel of Home's Conservative government, this lead the Labour party to create an increased lead when it came to looking at the opinion polls.

Wilson then leader of the opposition went into his 1963 conference speech talking about how Britain was ready to fully exploit the " white heat of the technological revolution. " The labour party was trying to show itself as being the right force to progress Britain against the ineffective current political establishment. As Peter shore said "... it was a case of smart Alec against dull Alec... ". The Labour party won the General Election in 1964 because of a skilful election campaign and certain errors in the Conservative party around the time of the election being called.

The Labour party during the first years in Government between 1964-66 were successful in achieving its objectives, Labour wanted the tackle the <https://assignbuster.com/assess-the-extent-to-which-the-wilson-government-achieved/>

problems in the Economy and the changing of Britain into a post industrial society. The Labour party therefore projected the image of following a “ third way” in which the economy would be managed with scientific planning. This led to Wilson creating the Department of Economic Affairs (DEA) with George Brown at its head, this department would be separate from the treasury and would allow Britain to plan its way out of the economic difficulties.

It was created because the treasury was seen with being strongly conservative and the high ranks of the Labour Party considered this as key to Britain’s economic failure. The idea seemed a successful resolution as France was working on a more planned economy also and had much higher GDP growth rate. However the reality showed that the government failed in its objectives. Ironically the problem of this “ Super Department” was that it wasn’t planned prior to its introduction. As George Brown stated “ I think it is a pity that we didn’t produce a ‘ Blueprint’ setting out precisely what we wanted to achieve”.

The treasury also went out of its own way to make the work of the new department fail, reports suggested that Brown’s phone was bugged to allow the Treasury to keep track of the dealings he made and the dealings of the office. Even though these difficulties Brown still produced the ‘ National Plan’ which aimed at the economic targets set out in the General Election of 1964. It was an achievement to create this plan which aimed at stimulating industrial production and exports by encouraging cooperation between the government, employers and trade unions.

It was a success that the plan was drafted however it was a failed attempt. The grand expansion targets set out in the plan were not met because at the time it was published the economy was in too bad of a way for cooperation alone to work. An emergency budget was released in July 1966, which aimed at cutting public spending and increasing taxes. This was seen as a turning point in the Wilson government in which the public had a growing distrust about the government's capability to fix the economy.

In 1966 Wilson called a General Election in the aim of increasing his parliamentary majority, The Election was called for March 1966 and The Labour Party was victorious and increased their majority from 3 to 96. The Wilson Government had many difficulties in the period from 1966-70 with the difficulty with the trade unions due to economic problems leading to tension. Wilson believed that increasing inflation and Britain's balance of payments deficit presents major treats to economic progress, wages and salary increases much be kept more in check.

A prices and incomes board was established to regulate pay settlements. The trade unions hoped that the Wilson government would bring those benefits and they resented being lectures and told to be reasonable. This failure with the trade unions set back government objectives and the economy took heavy blows. The government was hit with a series of industrial strikes and disputes which included the National seamen's strike in 1966 and the Dockers' strike of 1967. The Wilson government was running out of ideas on how to control the economy and in November 1967 devaluation of the Pound was introduced.

This was because of the deficit being so large that Wilson had asked for another loan from the IMF, blaming the seamen's strike. The loan was only seen as a stop gap. The Devaluation involved reducing the exchange rate of sterling from \$2.80 to \$2.40 for every £1. The aim was to make British goods easier to sell abroad. The delayed implementation of the measures meant that the mere financial adjustment turned into a political and economic failure for Wilson and the Labour party. Showing that the government could not run the economy and had failed to deliver objectives set out in 1964 and 1966.

Callaghan stood down as Chancellor in 1967 swapping places with Home Secretary Roy Jenkins. The trade unions were angered that Wilson had tried to blame them for the government's financial difficulties and many academics had concluded that Wilson overestimated the Balance of Payments deficit, leading to a failure in the majority of its economic objectives. However aside from the Political and Economic side the Wilson government did achieve some of its objectives in the social changes it set forth to create. The Wilson government can't be criticised for its social reform.

The Race Relations Acts, 1965 and 1968 prohibited racial discrimination in public places and in areas such as employment and housing and made Incitement to racial hatred an offence. More important social reforms such as the Abortion Act of 1967 which permitted the legal termination of pregnancy and the abolition of the death penalty in 1969 which made permanent a measure that was passed in 1965 that had suspended the operation of the death penalty. These social changes and reforms may be

said to mark an important stage in the modernising of Britain's social attitudes. Many were the work of Roy Jenkins.

He personified the tolerant, sophisticated attitudes that he wished to see become predominant in Britain. These were successful for the Labour party and Wilson government. Showing objectives were achieved which cannot be said as much in industry and the economy. By the time of the general election in 1970 there was the feeling that the Labour government had failed to live up to expectations. The sense of disappointment was felt harsh by the young. Arguments stated that Wilson entered office claiming to be the head of a modernising and reforming government but really all that was changed was the style and not the content.

In conclusion the Wilson government had some success in the social reforms it implemented but didn't plan enough to address the economy and industry, it lost the support of the trade unions and was seen to be a failure from the public. In 1970 even though Labour party optimism Edward Heath walked into 10 Downing Street as the Conservative prime minister with a 30 seat majority. This showed the ultimate fail of a clever but seemingly unorganised Labour party and government which didn't successfully achieve enough of its objectives and therefore lost the 1970 election.