

The 1964 General Election



I'M
FOR
PLANNING
VOTE
LABOUR
MAY 10



IT'S A
CLEAR
CHOICE
VOTE
LABOUR
MAY 10

Close run contest with Labour squeezing to victory by 4 seats.

Why?

Labour Election Victory?

- Sense of growing impatience with the old 'Establishment' and desire for generational change > showed through Private Eye and That Was The Week That Was.
- Increased support for Labour. Wilson was a strong campaigner > confident in dealing with media and more focused than Gaitskell.
- Split between Bevanites and Gaitskellites was over, both key personalities dead. Wilson had acted as a great uniter of party.
- Labour could exploit the powerful public mood that it was 'time for a change' - Labour election slogan "Thirteen years of Tory misrule" proved very effective

Or did the Conservatives lose?

- Economic growth in western Europe was leaving Britain behind.
- Macmillan tried to get Britain into the EEC, which was rejected.
- Cycle of "stop-go" economics continued. 800,000 unemployed.
- Britain had a big balance of payment deficit - had to ask for a loan at the IMF.
- In 1962, Night of the Long Knives - Macmillan sacked seven senior ministers.
- Beaching report: recommended cuts in Britain's railway network - caused public outrage.
- Profumo affair along with other scandals.
- Macmillan fell ill and had to resign in 1963.
- Alec Douglas-Home replaced Macmillan - was a "compromise candidate". He was old and very old fashioned.
- Satire (mocking comedy) became popular - Conservatives became targets.

Something else to consider...

- 'Liberal revival'
- Seemed dead with only 2.5% vote through post-war era.
- However, in 1960 there were signs of life under Grimond's guidance. Won 11.2%vote/9 seats in 1964 > evidence of softening of Conservative vote and pre-echo to the revival post 1964.
- It is possible that votes taken by the Liberals from the Conservative candidates had just tipped the balance in such a close election race.