Why was Churchill out of office for so long?

The 1930s were a threatening period for Britain. Germany, led by a ruthless and extreme dictator had emerged as a threat to European peace. Japan was intent on creating a new empire in the Far East and was threatening China. Italy was ruled by an expansionist dictator, there was a civil war in Spain and a communist regime in Russia was imprisoning and killing large numbers of their own people. Europe and the USA were suffering from the worst economic depression in history.

In this type of situation, it was thought that Churchill might thrive and be needed as a daring and imaginative political leader with a great experience of government. However, this was not the case. Churchill was still associated with his past decisions (including Gallipoli campaign during the first world war and returning Britain to the Gold Standard when he was Chancellor of the exchequer in 1925). He was also seen as unhelpful in providing a calm and united government for foreign investors and markets. There was no room for him in the national government, made up of labour, conservatives and the liberals, to tackle Britain’s economic crisis. Churchill also lost huge savings on the stock market and was forced to write for a living in order to maintain his beloved home Chartwell, in Kent.

Other issues included:

- His views on India
- His views on the abdication of king Edward VIII
- Rearmament
- Concessions to Hitler

Churchill’s views on India

Churchill’s views on India was one of the reasons he was out of government for so long. Churchill saw India as the “jewel in the crown” of the British empire and it had to be protected to maintain the empire. Churchill thought that British rule put an end to barbaric practices and meant social and economic progress. He also thought it ensured good government, prevented endemic corruption and protected the weak.

This was not good for Churchill as he was in the minority position in favour of maintaining India during the ever growing fight for Indian independence. He found himself allied with eccentric and racist organisations. He was bitter in his attacks towards the conservatives and threatened to “shatter the conservatives”. Churchill did however, admitted defeat and even invited a friend of Gandhi’s to lunch and wished India the best of luck. He feared India would be “a burden to us” and never really accepted them as equals even later in his life.