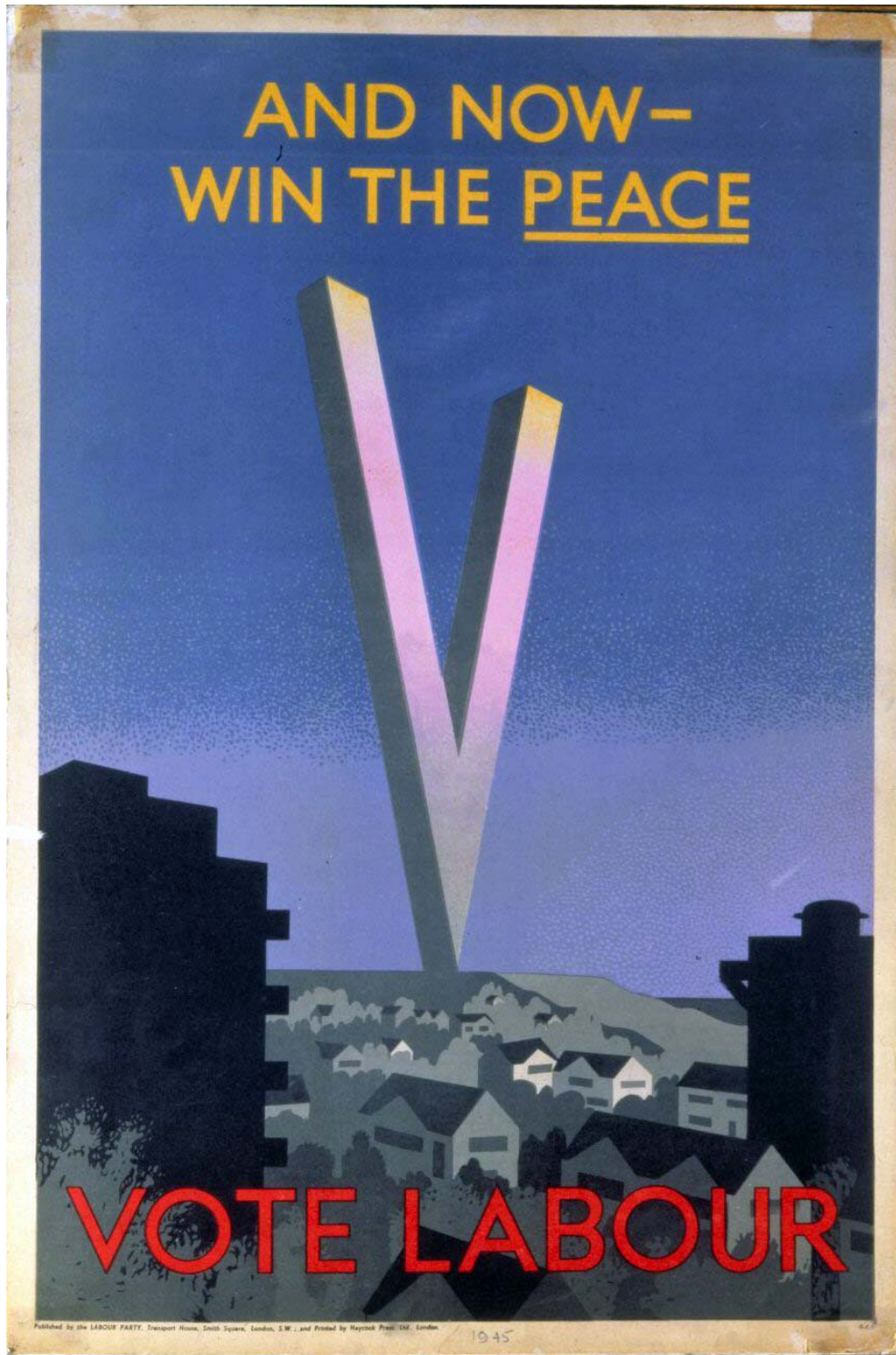


HOW MIGHT CHURCHILL HAVE REPLIED TO THIS TELEGRAM?

A Labour Party poster for the General Election of July 1945

Catalogue ref: MoL 2004.156/24



WESTERN EUROPE 1939–1945: END OF THE WAR

What is this source?

The Labour party used this poster in their campaign for the General Election in 1945. British artist John Armstrong (1893–1973) created it.

This was the first General Election held since 1935, there were no elections held in the war years.

What's the background to this source?

Throughout the war there was a National Government that included politicians from all of the main political parties. One of the top priorities for this National Government was defence against air raids. When Germany was unable to invade Britain in 1940 Hitler then attacked British cities from the air in what became known as the Blitz. This lasted until the autumn of 1941. The Blitz did huge damage to British towns and cities. Over 40,000 civilians were killed and over a million buildings destroyed. In 1944 there was a second blitz as the Germans had developed rocket-powered weapons called V1s and V2s. These weapons killed about 8000 civilians.

Air Raid Precautions (ARP) had been a fact of life for British people throughout the war. It was another aspect of government control that would have to be phased out at the end of the war.

It's worth knowing that...

Thousands of British people were homeless by the end of the war. The British people were expecting a new and better Britain as a reward for their war efforts. They wanted new housing, and not the poor quality housing which many had suffered from before the war. They also wanted other improvements such as health care, national insurance and expanded education. Probably the greatest challenge facing Britain after the war was to build this New Britain. You can see how the poster is attempting to show that Labour understands this view.

As the war was coming to an end there was a General Election held in Britain in July 1945. Winston Churchill thought that the British people would trust his leadership in the post war age. In fact, he was decisively beaten and a new Labour government won a landslide victory under Clement Attlee. It was a sign that British people trusted Churchill as a war leader but did not see him as the man to build a new, better Britain.

WESTERN EUROPE 1939–1945: END OF THE WAR

How will you use this source?

1. Describe this poster in as much detail as you can. What is the message behind the poster?
2. Do you think this poster would have appealed to the people shown in our VE-Day photographs celebrating the end of the war?
3. Churchill faced an election in July 1945 and was worried he would be defeated. Can you explain why?
4. What have you learned from this source that would go into Churchill's reply to the telegram?

You could use this framework for Churchill's reply.
