



# David Lloyd George

PRIME MINISTER OF UNITED KINGDOM

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Alternative Titles: 1st Earl Lloyd-George of Dwyfor, Viscount Gwynedd of Dwyfor

David Lloyd George, also called (1945) 1st Earl Lloyd-George of Dwyfor, Viscount Gwynedd of Dwyfor, (born Jan. 17, 1863, Manchester, Eng.—died March 26, 1945, Ty-newydd, near Llanystumdwy, Caernarvonshire, Wales), British prime minister (1916–22) who dominated the British political scene in the latter part of World War I. He was raised to the peerage in the year of his death.



## David Lloyd George

### QUICK FACTS

David Lloyd George  
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**BORN**  
January 17, 1863  
Manchester, England

**DIED**  
March 26, 1945 (aged 82)  
Caernarvonshire, Wales

### TITLE / OFFICE

House Of Lords, United Kingdom  
(1945-1945)

Prime Minister, United Kingdom  
(1916-1922)

Chancellor Of The Exchequer,  
United Kingdom (1908-1915)

House Of Commons, United  
Kingdom (1890-1945)

**POLITICAL AFFILIATION**  
Liberal Party

**ROLE IN**  
World War I  
Paris Peace Conference

# Early Life

Lloyd George's father was a Welshman from [Pembrokeshire](#) and had become headmaster of an elementary school in Manchester. His mother was the daughter of David Lloyd, a Baptist minister. His father died in June 1864, leaving Mrs. George in poverty. She moved to Llanystumdwy in Caernarvonshire, where her brother Richard, a shoemaker and Baptist minister, supported her and her children; and it was from him that David Lloyd George imbibed many of his formative beliefs. His uncle enabled him to embark at the age of 14 on the career of a solicitor; he became articled (1879) to a firm at Portmadoc, passing his final examination in 1884. In Wales, as in [Ireland](#), an anglicized and Anglican Tory "ascendancy" class of landed gentry dominated a Celtic people of different race and religion. The causes of the Liberal Party, the Welsh nation, and Nonconformity were inseparable in the atmosphere in which Lloyd George was raised, and he first made his name by a successful battle in the courts to establish the right of [Nonconformists](#) to burial in the churchyard of their parish. Ironically, he who came to be the standard-bearer of the oppressed religious sects had lost his faith even as a boy.

As a young man, Lloyd George had the [romantic](#) good looks that ensured success with women. After numerous love affairs, he was married in 1888 to Margaret Owen, who bore him two sons and three daughters. The marriage cannot be described as happy. Lloyd George was incapable of [fidelity](#), and his affairs with other women were [notorious](#). His wife stood by him on many occasions, but in the end his behaviour was too much for even her long-suffering tolerance.



David Lloyd George and his wife, Margaret, with their daughter Megan.

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Lloyd George entered Parliament in 1890, winning a by-election at Caernarvon Boroughs, the seat he retained for 55 years. He soon made a name for himself in the [House of Commons](#) by his [audacity](#), charm, wit, and mastery of the art of debate. During the 10 years of Liberal opposition that followed the election of 1895, he became a leading figure in the radical wing of the party. He bitterly and courageously opposed the [South African War](#) and in 1901 was nearly lynched in [Birmingham](#), the stronghold of [Joseph Chamberlain](#) and [Conservative](#) imperialism. With the arrival of peace, Lloyd George worked up a great agitation in [Wales](#) against tax-aided grants to church schools established by Balfour's Education Act (1902).

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Arthur J. Balfour resigned in December 1905, and [Sir Henry Campbell-Bannerman](#) formed a Liberal administration, appointing Lloyd George to the Cabinet as president of the Board of Trade. In that office, he was responsible for important legislation: the Merchant Shipping Act (1906), improving seamen's living conditions, but also endangering their lives by raising the [Plimsoll line](#) on newly constructed ships; the Patents and Designs Act (1907), preventing foreign exploitation of British inventions; and the Port of London Act (1908), setting up the [Port of London](#) Authority. He also earned a high reputation by his patient work in settling strikes. He suffered a cruel [bereavement](#) in November 1907, when his daughter Mair died of [appendicitis](#) at the age of 17. Years afterward, the sight of her portrait could plunge him into tears.

*Chancellor of the Exchequer*. Campbell-Bannerman's health failed in 1908. He was succeeded as prime minister by the chancellor of the Exchequer, [Herbert Henry Asquith](#), who appointed Lloyd George to take his own place. This was a notable promotion and made him at least a strong competitor for the premiership after Asquith. By this time, the Liberal Party's fortunes were beginning to languish. The [House of Lords](#) had blocked much of its social reform legislation, and the radical wing of the party was concerned that its thunder might be stolen by the [nascent Labour Party](#) unless the deadlock could be broken. At the same time, the demand for more battleships to match the German naval program threatened the finances available for social reform. It was to meet these difficulties that Lloyd George framed the famous "[People's Budget](#)" of 1909, calling for taxes upon unearned increment on the sale of land and on land values, higher death duties, and a supertax on incomes above £3,000. Moreover, it seemed for a time that the House of Lords' veto on progressive legislation would be bypassed, since the custom of the constitution forbade the upper house from interfering with the budget. In fact, however, the Conservative majority in the House of Lords, against the advice of some of its wiser members, decided to reject it. The consequences of this rejection were two general elections, a major [constitutional crisis](#), and the ultimate passage of the [Parliament Act of 1911](#), which severely curtailed the powers of the upper house. The principal burden of all this fell upon Asquith, but Lloyd George gave him vigorous support in a series of notable philippics against the [aristocracy](#) and the rich. The most famous of all was his speech at Limehouse, where he denounced the rapacity of the landlord class, especially the dukes, in unforgettable language.

David Lloyd George, 1908.

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In 1913 he faced one of the gravest personal crises in his career. In April 1912, along with [Rufus Isaacs](#), the [attorney general](#), he had purchased shares in the Marconi Wireless Telegraph Company of America at a rate well below that available to the general public. The American Marconi company was legally independent of the British concern, but the two companies were closely connected, and the latter's shares had recently boomed as a result of the government's decision to accept its proposal to construct a chain of radio stations throughout the empire. Lloyd

George and Isaacs denied, in somewhat ambiguous language, any transactions in the shares of "the Marconi company," a denial that technically referred only to the British company but was generally assumed to cover the American as well. A select committee of the House of Commons revealed the facts and, although by a party majority it acquitted the ministers of blame, Lloyd George's reputation was damaged.

## Social Reform And The Outbreak Of War

Lloyd George's major achievement during the years immediately before the war was in the field of social insurance. Inspired by a visit to Germany (1908), where he studied the Bismarckian scheme of insurance benefits, Lloyd George decided to introduce health and unemployment insurance on a similar basis in Britain. This he did in the National Insurance Act of 1911. The measure inspired bitter opposition and was even unpopular with the working class, who were not convinced by Lloyd George's slogan "ninepence for fourpence," the difference in these two figures being the employer's and the state's contribution. Lloyd George, undeterred, piloted his measure through Parliament with great skill and determination. He thus laid the foundations of the modern welfare state and, if he had done nothing else, would deserve fame for that achievement.

Though much of the government's time during these years was occupied by the Irish question, Lloyd George played little part in it and, on the whole, left foreign policy to his colleagues. It was, therefore, something of a surprise when, in July 1911, after careful consultation with Asquith and Sir Edward Grey, he issued a formidable warning to Germany over the Moroccan crisis. When the question of entry into the war convulsed the Cabinet in late July and early August 1914, he seemed at first to incline to the isolationist section. For a brief moment he contemplated retirement. But the tide of events swept him to the other side. As chancellor, he plunged into the financial problems posed by the war.

# Minister Of Munitions And Secretary Of State For War

Throughout the remainder of 1914 and the early months of 1915, Lloyd George was a vigorous advocate of increased munitions production. Here he came into sharp conflict with [Lord Kitchener](#) in the War Office. The resignation of Admiral Fisher in 1915 forced Asquith to reconstruct the government on a coalition basis and admit the [Conservatives](#). In the new administration, Lloyd George became minister of munitions. In this capacity, he made one of the most notable contributions to the victory of the Allies. His methods were unorthodox and shocked the [civil service](#), but his energy was immense. He imported able assistants from big business and used his eloquence to induce the cooperation of [organized labour](#). When, in the summer of 1916, the great Battle of the Somme began, supplies were forthcoming.

Lloyd George acquired definite views on war strategy at an early stage. He doubted the possibility of breaking through on the Western Front and advocated instead a flank attack from the [Near East](#). He was thus at loggerheads with the view of the official military [hierarchy](#), cogently pressed by [Sir Douglas Haig](#) and [Sir William Robertson](#), that the war could only be won in the West. On June 5, 1916, Kitchener was drowned on his way to Russia, when his ship struck a German mine. A last-minute accident—acute developments in the Irish situation—alone had prevented Lloyd George from travelling with him. After some hesitation, Asquith appointed him to the vacant position at the War Office.

Lloyd George held the post for five months, but Robertson as chief of the imperial [general staff](#) possessed nearly all the important powers of the war minister. Lloyd George chafed under these restrictions, the more so because he disagreed with Robertson on issues of strategy. Thus frustrated, he began to survey the whole direction of the war with increasing skepticism; and he did not conceal his doubts from his friends who, by the end of November, had become convinced that Asquith should delegate the day-to-day running of the war to a small committee whose chairman should be Lloyd George. There was undoubtedly widespread uneasiness at Asquith's conduct of affairs, particularly in the [Conservative Party](#). Asquith was manoeuvred into resigning on December 5 and was replaced two days later by Lloyd George. He was supported by the leading Conservatives, but the most prominent Liberal ministers resigned with Asquith.

# Prime Minister

Lloyd George was now 54 and at the height of his powers. His energy, eloquence, and ability had already made him the leading statesman of the day, and his accession to the premiership was highly popular in the country generally. He immediately substituted a small War Cabinet of five, which was to be in constant session, for the body of 23 that had hitherto conducted affairs. The result was a general speeding up of decisions.

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David Lloyd George, caricature by Max Beerbohm, 1920.

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One of Lloyd George's most notable efforts was in combating the [submarine](#) menace, which, in early 1917, threatened to starve Britain into submission. He achieved this by forcing the adoption of the convoy system upon a reluctant [Admiralty](#). The food shortage resulting from the submarine war was [acute](#). Drastic action had to be taken to step up agricultural production, and eventually a system of food rationing had to be introduced (1918). In these matters Lloyd George was at his best, [contemptuous](#) of red tape, determined to take action and to make his will prevail.

It was in the field of [grand strategy](#) that he was least successful. Lloyd George remained profoundly skeptical of the ability of the British high command to conduct even a "Western" strategy successfully. Without warning Haig or Robertson in advance, he confronted them at the Calais Conference of February 1917 with a plan to place the British army under French command for General [Robert-Georges Nivelle's](#) forthcoming offensive. Haig and Robertson deeply distrusted Lloyd George from that moment onward. The Nivelle offensive was a total failure, and Lloyd George was, as a result, on shaky ground when he endeavoured to resist Haig's proposals for a major British campaign in Flanders in the summer. After much hesitation, he gave way, and on July 31, 1917, the ill-fated [Passchendaele offensive](#) began. Although it may have forestalled a possible German attack on the French, Passchendaele, with enormous loss of

life, achieved none of its main objectives. Lloyd George was now convinced of the incompetence of the British high command.

He still dared not take action against them openly. Instead, he began what Sir [Winston Churchill](#) called “a series of extremely laborious and mystifying maneuvers,” with the object of creating a unified command under someone other than Haig. In February 1918 Robertson offered his resignation, which Lloyd George accepted, but Haig remained as commander in chief. Such was Lloyd George’s distrust of Haig that, during the winter of 1917–18, he had deliberately kept him short of troops for fear that he might renew the attack. The result was that the German commander, General [Erich Ludendorff](#), came near to launching a successful offensive against the British sector in March 1918. The emergency caused a unified command under Marshal [Ferdinand Foch](#) to be established (April), and by May the situation had stabilized.

The tide now turned, and the Western Allies launched a series of successful attacks upon the exhausted Germans. The Armistice of November 1918 presented Lloyd George with a dilemma. Should he allow a return to peacetime party politics or continue the coalition? There was little doubt of the answer. The leader of the Conservatives, [Bonar Law](#), was willing to cooperate. A somewhat perfunctory offer to include Asquith was declined. The ensuing election in December gave the coalitionists an overwhelming victory. The rift between Lloyd George and Asquith’s supporters was now wider than ever, however, and Lloyd George was now largely dependent on Conservative support.

As one of the three great statesmen at [Versailles](#), Lloyd George must bear a major responsibility for the [peace settlement](#). He pursued a middle course between [Georges Clemenceau](#) and [Woodrow Wilson](#). But, throughout, Lloyd George was under pressure to pursue the more draconian policy of Clemenceau. It is to his credit that the final settlement was not far worse than it was. The treaty was well received in Britain, and in August 1919 the king conferred on Lloyd George the [Order of Merit](#).

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(From left to right) Italian Prime Minister Vittorio Emanuele Orlando, British Prime Minister David Lloyd George, French Premier Georges Clemenceau, and U.S. Pres. Woodrow Wilson, Paris, 1919.

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A major domestic problem was Ireland, where the [Sinn Fein](#) refused to recognize the British Parliament. From 1919 to 1921 a civil war raged. In the summer of 1921, Lloyd George, with full agreement of his Conservative colleagues, reversed the policy of repression in Ireland and began the negotiations that culminated in Irish independence in December 1921. The more rigid Tories never forgave this “surrender,” as they deemed it. In 1922 Lloyd George ran into trouble over the so-called honours scandal, when accusations were made that peerages and other honours were being sold for large campaign contributions. Tory discontent was rife, when, from a wholly unexpected quarter, a crisis occurred that drove Lloyd George from power forever. This was the [Çanakkale incident](#), in which it seemed to critics that the reckless foreign policy of the government had led Britain to the verge of an unnecessary war with Turkey. When the Conservative leaders decided to [appeal](#) to the country on a coalition basis once again, a party revolt ensued. Bonar Law, who had retired because of ill health in 1921, returned to the political scene. On Oct. 19, 1922, a two-to-one majority of Conservative members of Parliament [endorsed](#) his and [Stanley Baldwin's](#) plea to fight as an independent party. Lloyd George at once resigned.

## Later Years And Assessment

The long twilight of Lloyd George's career was a [melancholy](#) anticlimax. The feud with the Asquithians was never healed, and from 1926 to 1931 he headed an ailing [Liberal Party](#). He devoted himself thereafter to writing his *War Memoirs* (1933–36) and *The Truth About the Peace Treaties* (1938). In 1940 Winston Churchill invited him to join his War Cabinet, but Lloyd George declined, ostensibly on grounds of age and health. Just two months before his death, he was elevated to the peerage as Earl Lloyd-George of Dwyfor.

David Lloyd George, 1943.

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Lloyd George possessed eloquence; extraordinary charm and persuasiveness; a capacity to see the heart of problems whose complexity baffled lesser men; a profound sympathy with oppressed classes and races; and a genuine hatred of those who abused power, whether based on wealth or caste or military might. But there was an obverse side to these virtues: his love of [devious](#) methods; his carelessness over appointments and honours; and a streak of ruthlessness that left little room for the cultivation of personal friendship.

Lloyd George, for all his greatness, aroused in many persons a profound sense of mistrust, and it was in the upper-middle class, represented in politics by Stanley Baldwin and [Neville Chamberlain](#), that he inspired the most acute misgivings. They were both determined to exclude him from office, and it would be wrong to ascribe his long years in the political wilderness solely to the declining fortunes of the Liberal Party. Lloyd George was thus never able to recover the position he had lost in 1922. It was one of the tragedies of the interwar years that, in an era not notable for political talent, the one man of genius in politics should have had to remain an impotent spectator. But his earlier achievements make his place in history secure: he laid the foundations of the welfare state and led Britain to victory in World War I.

*[Robert Norman William Blake, Baron Blake](#)*

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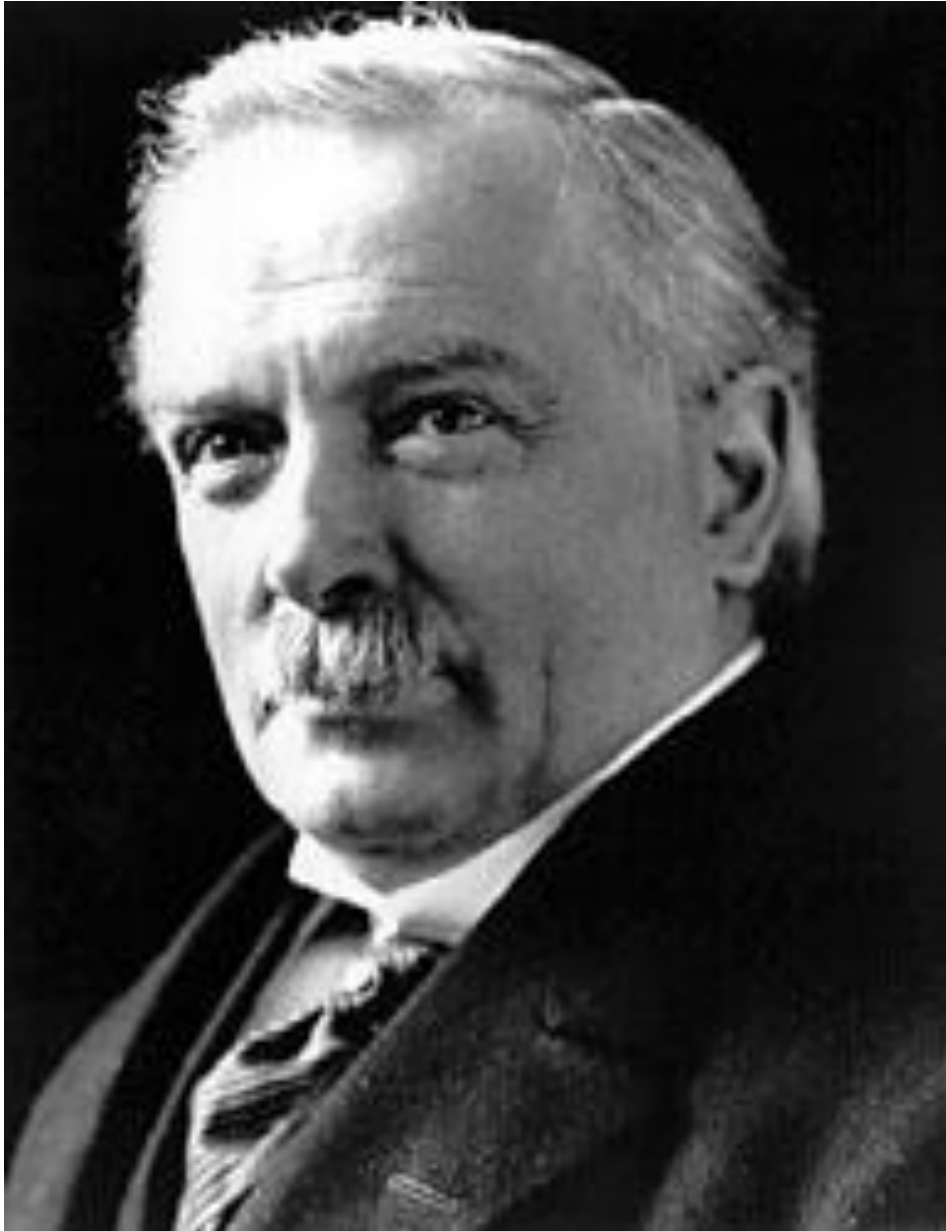
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# David Lloyd George

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David Lloyd George



David Lloyd George and his wife, Margaret, with their daughter Megan.



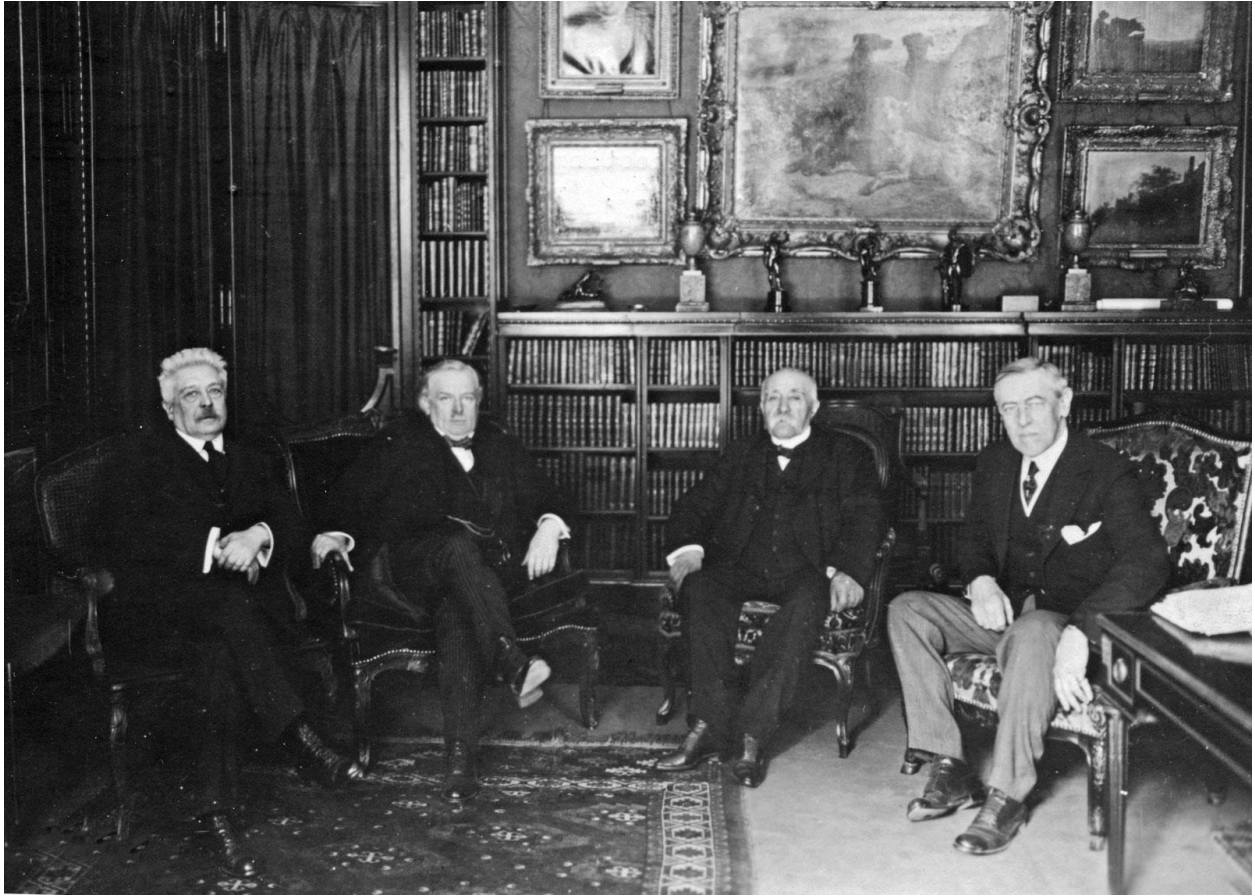


David Lloyd George, 1908.



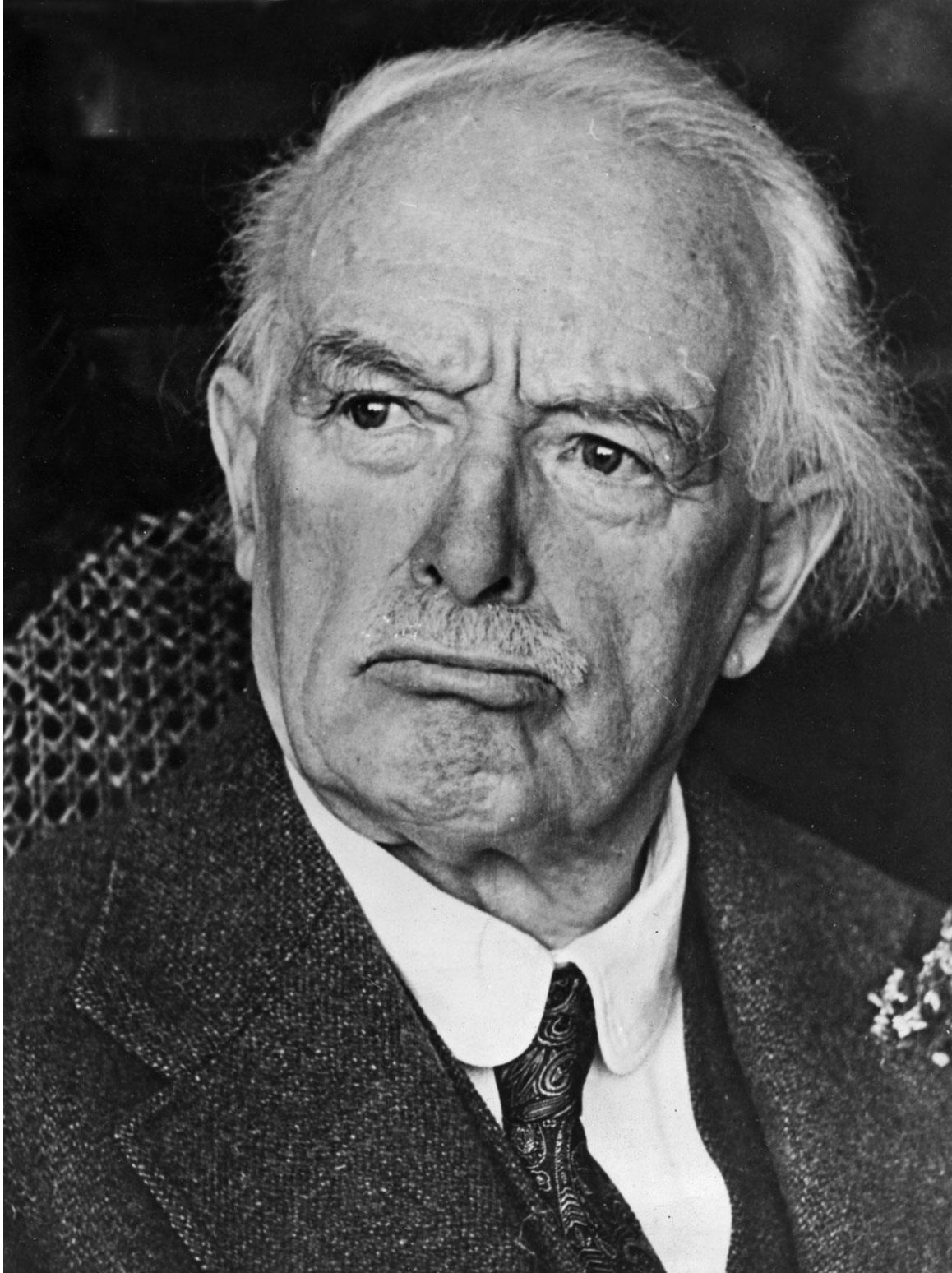


David Lloyd George, caricature by Max Beerbohm, 1920.



(From left to right) Italian Prime Minister Vittorio Emanuele Orlando, British Prime Minister David Lloyd George, French...





David Lloyd George, 1943.





(Left to right) The "Big Four": David Lloyd George of Britain, Vittorio Orlando of Italy, Georges Clemenceau of France, and...