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Практика усного та писемного мовлення

THE IMPACT OF GLOBALIZATION ON BRITISH IDENTITY

Навчально-методичний посібник
для здобувачів першого (бакалаврського)
рівня вищої освіти спеціальності 035 Філологія (Германські мови та літератури (переклад включно))

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Навчально-методичний посібник, створений на основі тематичного та комунікативного підходів до навчання, ознайомлює здобувачів із особливостями британської національної культури через автентичні тексти. У посібнику висвітлюються ключові концепти британської культури у їхньому взаємозв’язку та національно-культурній специфіці: національний характер, патріотизм, державний устрій, ідеали, життєві переконання та ставлення до інших культур. Матеріали посібника можуть бути використані під час занять з практичного курсу англійської мови та лінгвокраїнознавства англомовних країн. Посібник рекомендовано для здобувачів першого (бакалаврського) рівня вищої освіти спеціальності 035 «Філологія» за освітньо-професійною програмою «035. Філологія (Германські мови та літератури (переклад включно))», а також усіх, хто прагне глибше ознайомитися з різними аспектами життя країн, мова яких вивчається.

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PREFACE

Навчально-методичний посібник призначений для підготовки здобувачів першого (бакалаврського) рівня вищої освіти спеціальності 035 Філологія (Германські мови та літератури (переклад включно)), перша – англійська за освітньо-професійною програмою Філологія (Германські мови та літератури (переклад включно)). Створено його з метою підвищення якості навчально-методичного забезпечення підготовки фахівців із зазначеної спеціальності та з метою активізації умінь і навичок іншомовного спілкування й ознайомленням із соціально-культурними аспектами англійської мови.

Метою цього посібника є формування, комунікативної і професійної компетенції студентів. Розвиток загальної компетенції досягається за рахунок вдосконалення отриманих раніше когнітивних прийомів, що дозволяють здійснювати пізнавальну і комунікативну діяльність; підвищення рівня професійної та комунікативної компетенції передбачає роботу над лінгвістичним, соціокультурним і прагматичним компонентами дискурсу. Вирішенню цих завдань сприяють включені в посібник творчі завдання для засвоєння і самостійної роботи із зазначеними компонентами дискурсу. У посібнику розглядаються базові концепти британської культури в їх взаємозв'язку з національно-культурною специфікою: національний характер, патріотизм, державний устрій, ідеали і життєві переконання, ставлення до інших культур. Знайомство з культурою мови, що вивчається відбувається шляхом порівняння і постійної оцінки наявних раніше знань і понять із знову отриманими. Головна мета посібника – забезпечення комунікативної компетенції в актах міжкультурної комунікації, перш за все через адекватне сприйняття мови співрозмовника і розуміння оригінальних текстів. У процесі вивчення дисципліни студент повинен знати особливості історичного, політичного, економічного, соціального і культурного розвитку країн, що вивчаються; географічне положення і політичний лад; основні напрямки розвитку культури англомовних країн, а також національну своєрідність і

колорит цих країн; характерні національні риси представників англомовних країн.

Зазначені положення сприяють розумінню здобувачами історичних та соціокультурних особливостей країни, мова якої вивчається; ознайомленню студентів з інформацією країнознавчого і лінгвістичного характеру та висвітленню різних аспектів сучасного життя, історії та культури народу. Посібник адаптований до вимог навчальної програми у системі вищої освіти і, безумовно, сприятиме глибшому оволодінню матеріалу та систематизації знань.

Представлений навчально-методичний посібник покликаний заповнити прогалину в забезпеченні теоретичного матеріалу. Запропонована у посібнику інформація покриває частину програмного часу і містить список рекомендованої літератури, до якої студенти можуть звернутися під час аудиторної та самостійної роботи з дисципліни.

Part 1. Political life

1.1. The public attitude to politics

Politicians in Britain do not have a good reputation. To describe someone who is not a professional politician as 'a politician' is to criticize him or her, suggesting a lack of trustworthiness. It is not that people hate their politicians. They just regard them with a high degree of suspicion. They do not expect them to be corrupt or to use their position La amass personal wealth, but they do expect them to be frequently dishonest. People are not really shocked when the government is caught lying. On the other hand, they would be very shocked indeed if it was discovered that the government was doing anything actually illegal. A scandal such as the Watergate affair in the USA in the early 1970^{S} would endanger the stability of the whole of political life.

At an earlier point in the 'diary', Jim Hacker is wondering why the Prime Minister has resigned. He does not believe the Tumour that £ 1 million worth of diamonds have been found in the Prime Minister's house. This is partly, no doubt, because he does not think the Prime Minister could be so corrupt but it is also because 'it's never been officially denied. The first rule of politics is Never Believe Anything Until It's Been Officially Denied'. This is the basis of the joke in the two conversations in the extract. Duncan and Eric are only sure that Jim wants to be Prime Minister after he implies that he doesn't.

The lack of enthusiasm for politicians may be seen in the fact that surveys have shown a general ignorance of who they are. More than half of the adults in Britain do not know the name of their local Member of Parliament (MP), even though there is just one of these for each area, and quite a high proportion do not even know the names of the important government ministers or leaders of the major political parties.

The British were not always so unenthusiastic. In centuries past, it was a maxim of gentlemen's clubs that nobody should mention politics or religion in polite conversation. If anybody did, there was a danger that the conversation would become

too heated, people would become bad-tempered and perhaps violent. However, there has been no real possibility of a revolution or even of a radical change in the style of government for almost two centuries now. This stability is now generally taken for granted. Most people rarely see any reason to become passionate about polities and nobody regards it as a 'dangerous' topic of conversation. They are more likely to regard it as a boring topic of conversation! However, this lack of enthusiasm is not the same as complete disenchantment. Three quarters of the adult population are interested enough in politics to vote at national elections, even though voting is not compulsory. There is a general feeling of confidence in the stability and workability of the system.

Yes, Prime Minister is just one of many programmes and publications devoted to political satire. All of them are consistently and bitingly critical. Moreover, their criticism is typically not about particular policies but is directed at the attitudes of politicians, their alleged dishonesty and disloyalty, and at the general style of political life. Given this, you might think that people would be very angry, that there would be loud demands that the system be cleaned up, even public demonstrations. Not at all' The last demonstrations about such matters took place 150 years ago. You might also think that the politicians themselves would be worried about the negative picture that these satires paint of them. Far from it! On the back cover of the 1989 edition of *Yes,* Prime Minister there is a tribute from Margaret Thatcher, the real Prime Minister of the country throughout the 1980s. In it, she refers to the book's 'closely observed portrayal of what goes on in the corridors of power' (suggesting it is accurate) and how this portrayal has given her 'hours of pure joy'.

In Britain it is generally accepted that politics is a dirty business, a necessary evil. Therefore, politicians make sure that they do not appear too keen to do the job. They see themselves as being politicians out of a sense of public duty. That is why, in the extract, Jim Hacker does not admit that he actually wants to be Prime Minister. Ericand Duncan, and Jim himself, all know and accept that to be the Prime Minister is the ultimate goal of most politicians. But for Jim Hacker to admit this openly, even

in private conversation, would make him seem dangerously keen on power for its own sake.

1.2. The style of democracy

The British are said to have a high respect for the law. Although they may not have much respect for the present institutions of the law, this reputation is more or less true with respect to the principle of law. Of course, lots of crimes are committed, as in any other country, but there is little systematic law-breaking by large sections of the population. For example, tax evasion is not the national pastime that it is said to be in some countries.

However, while 'the law ' as a concept is largely respected, the British are comparatively unenthusiastic about making new laws. The general feeling is that, while you have to have laws sometimes, wherever possible it is best to do without them. In many aspects of life the country has comparatively few rules and regulations. This lack of regulation works both ways. Just as there are comparatively few rules telling the individual what he or she must or must not do,
so there are comparatively few rule s telling the government what it can or cannot do. Two unique aspects of British life will make this clear.

First, Britain is one of the very few European countries whose citizens do not have identity cards. Before the 19705, when tourism to foreign countries became popular (and so the holding of passports became more common), most people in the country went through life without ever owning a document whose main purpose was to identify them. British people are not obliged to carry identification with them. You do not even have to have your driving licence with you in your car. If the police ask to see it, you have twenty-four hours to take it to them!

Second, and on the other hand, Britain (unlike some other countries in western Europe) does not have a Freedom of Information Act. There is no law which obliges a government authority or agency to show you what information it has collected about you. In fact, it goes further than that. There is a law (called the Official Secrets Act) which obliges many government employees not to tell anyone about the details

of their work. It seems that in Britain, both your own identity and the information which the government has about your identity are regarded as, in a sense, private matters.

These two aspects are characteristic of the relationship in Britain between the individual and the state. To a large degree, the traditional assumption is that both should leave each other alone as much as possible, The duties of the individual towards the state are confined to not breaking the law and paying taxes. There is no nation al service (military or otherwise); people are not obliged to vote at elections if they can't be bothered; people do not have to register their change of address with any government authority when they move house.

Similarly, the government in Britain has a comparatively free hand. It would be correct to call the country 'a democracy' in the generally accepted sense of this word. But in Britain this democracy involves less participation by ordinary citizens in governing and lawmaking than it does in many other countries. There is no concept of these things being done 'by the people'. If the government wants to make an important change in the way that the country is run – to change, for example, the electoral system or the powers of the Prime Minister – it does not have to ask the people. It does not even have to have a special vote in Parliament with an especially high pro portion of MPs in favour. It just needs to get Parliament to agree in the same way as for any new law.

In many countries an important constitutional change cannot be made without a referendum in which everybody in the country has the chance to vote 'yes' or 'no'. In other countries, such as the USA, people often have the chance to vote on particular proposals for changing laws that directly affect their everyday life, on smoking in public places or the location of a new hospital, for example. Nothing like this happens in Britain. There has only been one countrywide referendum in British history (in 1975, on whether the country should stay in the European Community). In Britain democracy has never meant that the people have a hand in the running of the country; rather it means that the people choose who is to govern the country, and then let them get on with it!

1.4. The constitution

Britain is a constitutional monarchy. That means it is a country governed by a king or queen who accepts the advice of a parliament. It is also a parliamentary democracy. That is, it is a country whose government is controlled by a parliament which has been elected by the people. In other words, the basic system is not so different from anywhere else in Europe. The highest positions in the government are filled by members of the directly elected parliament. In Britain, as in many European countries, the official head of state, whether a monarch (as in Belgium, the Netherlands and Denmark) or a president (as in Germany, Greece and Italy) has little real power.

However, there are features of the British system of government which make it different from that in other countries and which are not 'modern' at all. The most notable of these is the question of the constitution. Britain is almost alone among modern states in that it does not have 'a constitution' at all. Of course, there are rules, regulations, principles and procedures for the running of the country – all the things that political scientists and legal experts study and which are known collectively as 'the constitution'. But there is no single written document which can be appealed to as the highest law of the land and the final arbiter in any matter of dispute. Nobody can refer to 'article 6' or 'the first amendment' or anything like that, because nothing like that exists.

Instead, the principles and procedures by which the country is governed and from which people's right s are derived come from a number of different sources. They have been built up, bit by bit, over the centuries. Some of them are written down in laws agreed by Parliament, some of them have been spoken and then written down (judgements made in a court) and some of them have never been written down at all. For example, there is no written law in Britain that says anything about who can be the Prime Minister or what the powers of the Prime Minister are, even though he or she is probably the most powerful person in the country. Similarly, there is no single written document which asserts people's rights. Some rights which are

commonly accepted in modern democracies (for example, the rights not to be discriminated against on the basis of sex or race) have been formally recognized by Parliament through legislation; but others (for example, the rights not to be discriminated against on the basis of religion or political views) have not. Nevertheless, it is understood that these latter rights are also part of the constitution.

1.2. The style of politics

Despite recent changes such as the televising of Parliament, political life in Britain is still influenced by the traditional British respect for privacy and love of secrecy. It is also comparatively informal. In both Parliament and government there is a tendency for important decisions to be taken , not at official public meetings, or even at prearranged private meetings, but at lunch, or over drinks, or in chance encounters in the corridors of power. It used to be said that the House of Commons was 'the most exclusive club in London'. And indeed, there are many features of Parliament which cause its members (MPs) to feel special and to feel a special sense of belonging with each other, even among those who have radically opposed political philosophies.

First, constitutional theory says that Parliament has absolute control over its own affairs and is, in fact, the highest power in the land. Second, there are the ancient traditions of procedure. Many of these serve to remind MPs of a time when the main division in politics was not between this party and that party but rather between Parliament itself and the monarch. Even the architecture of the Palace of Westminster (the home of both Houses of Parliament) contributes to this feeling. It is so confusing that only 'insiders' can possibly find their way around it. These features, together with the long years of political stability, have led to a genuine habit of co-operation among politicians of different parties. When you hear politicians arguing in the House of Commons or in a television studio, you might think that they hate each other. This is rarely the case. Often they are good friends. And even when it is the case, both normally see the practical advantage of co-operation. The advantage is that very little time is wasted fighting about how political business is

to be conducted fairly. For example, the order of business in Parliament is arranged by representatives of the parties beforehand so that enough time is given for the various points of view to be expressed. Another example is television advertising. By agreement, political parties are not allowed to buy time on television. Instead, each party is given a strict amount of time, with the two biggest parties getting exactly equal amounts. A very notable example is the system of pairing 'of MPs (The pairing system).

A guide to British political parties

Conservative party

History: developed from the group of MPs known as the Tories in the early nineteenth century and still often known informally by that name (especially in newspapers, because it takes up less space').
Traditional outlook: right of centre; stands for hierarchical authority and minimal government interference in the economy: likes to reduce income tax; gives high priority to national defence and internal law and order.
Since 1979: aggressive reform of education, welfare housing and many public services designed to increase consumer choice and or to introduce 'market economics' into their operation.
Organization: leader has relatively great degree of freedom to direct policy.
Leader May 2002, Iain Duncan Smith; May 2002, David William Donald Cameron; July 2016 Theresa Mary, Lady May; July 2019 Alexander Boris de Pfeffel Johnson.
Voters: the richer sections of society, plus a large minority of the working classes.
Money: mostly donations from business people.

Labour party

History: formed at the beginning of the twentieth century from an alliance of trade unionists and intellectuals.
First government in 1923.
Traditional outlook: left of centre; stands for equality, for the weaker people in society y and for more government involvement in the economy; more concerned to provide full social services than to keep income tax low.
Since 1979: opposition to Conservative reforms, although has accepted many of these by now; recently emphasis on community ethics and looser links with trade unions.
Organization: in theory, policies have to be approved by annual conference; in practice, leader has more power than this implies.
Leader: *May* 2002, *Tony Blair;* June 2007, *James Gordon Brown;*
Voters: working class, plus a small middle-class intelligentsia.
Money: more than half from trade unions.

Liberal Democratic party

History: formed in the late 1980s from a union of the Liberals (who developed from the Whigs of the early nineteenth century) and the Social Democrats (a breakaway group of Labour politicians).
Policies: regarded as in the centre or slightly left of centre; has always been strongly in favour of the EU; places more emphasis on the environment than other panics; believes in giving greater powers 10 local government and in reform of the electoral system.
Leader *(May*2002): Charles Kennedy.
Voters: from all classes, but more from the middle class.
Money: private donations (much poorer than the big two).

Nationalist parties

Both Plaid Cyrnru ('party of Wales' in the Welsh language) and the SNP (Scottish National Party) fight for devolution of govern mental powers. Many of their members, especially in the SNP, are willing to consider total independence from the UK. Both parties have usually had a few MPs at Westminster in the last fifty years, but well under half of the tot al numbers of MPs from their respective countries.

Parties in Northern Ireland

Parties here normally represent either the Protestant or the Catholic communities: There is one large comparatively moderate party on each side (the Protestant Ulster Unionists and the Catholic Social Democratic and Labour Party) and one or more other parties of more extreme views on each side (for example, the Protestant Democratic Unionists and the Catholic Sinn Fein). There is one party which asks for support from both communities – the Alliance party. It had not, by 2002, won any seats.

Other parties

There are numerous very small par ties, such as the Green Party, which is supported by environmentalists. There is a small party which was formerly the Communist party and a number of other left Wing parties, and also an extreme right Wing party which is fairly openly racist. It was previously called the National Front but since the 1980s has been called the British National Party (BNP). At the time of writing, none of these par ties had won a Single seat in Parliament in the second half of the twentieth century. In 1993, however, the BNP briefly won a seat on a local council.

1.6. The party system

Britain is normally described as having a 'two-party system'. This is because, since 1945, one of the two big parties has, by itself controlled the government, and members of these two parties have occupied more than 90% of all of the seats in the House of Commons. Moreover, this is not a peculiarly modern phenomenon. Basically the same situation existed throughout the nineteenth century, except that

the Liberal s, rather than Labour, were one of the two big parties. The Labour party was formed at the start of the twentieth century and within about thirty years had replaced the Liberal s in this role, One reason for the existence of this situation is the electoral system. The other is the nature of the origin of British political parties. Britain is unlike most other countries in that its parties were first formed inside Parliament, and were only later extended to the public at large. During the eighteenth-century Members of Parliament tended to divide themselves into two camps, those who usually supported the government of the time and those who usually did not. During the nineteenth century it gradually became the habit that the party which did not control the government presented itself as an alternative government. This idea of an alternative government has received legal recognition. The leader of the second biggest party in the House of Commons (or, more exactly, of the biggest party which is not in government) receives the title 'Leader of Her Majesty's Opposition' and even gets a salary to prove the importance of this role. He or she chooses a 'shadow cabinet', there by presenting the image of a team ready to fill the shoes of the government at a moment's notice.

As a result of these origins, neither party existed solely to look after the interests of one particular group (although some groups in society were naturally more attracted to one of the two parties than the other). Furthermore, although they could be distinguished by certain broad differences in their outlooks on life, the two parties did not exist to promote single, coherent political philosophies. The main reason for their existence was to gain power by forming effective coalitions of interest-groups and individuals.

Although the Labour party was formed outside Parliament, and, as its name implies, did exist to promote the interests of a particular group (the working class), it soon fitted into the established frame work. It is very difficult for smaller parties to challenge the dominance of the bigger ones. If any of them seem to have some good ideas, these ideas tend to be adopted by one of the three biggest parties, who all try to appeal to as large a section of the population as possible.

The fact that the party system originated in side Parliament has other consequences. Parties do not, as they do in many other countries, extend into every area of public and social life in the country. Universities, for example, each have the ir Conservative, Labour Liberal Democrat clubs, but when there is an election for officers of the student union, it is not normally fought according to national party division s. The same is true of elections within trade unions.

Another consequence is that it is usually a party's MPs who have the most control over part y policy and the biggest influence on the choice of party leader. This does not mean that the parties are undemocratic. Their members who are not MPs can have an effect on policy in a number of ways. First, they can make their views known at the annual party conference. In the case of the three main parties this takes place in the autumn and lasts about a week. Second, the local party has the power to decide who is going to be the party's candidate for MP in its area at the next election. However, these powers are limited by one important consideration – the appearance of unity. Party policies are always presented as potential government policies, and a party's leading MPs are always presented as potential ministers. If you want to look like a realistic potential government, you don't want to show the public your disagreement s. Party conferences are always televise d. As a result they sometimes tend to be show cases whose main purpose is not so much to debate important matters as to boost the spirits of party members and to show the public a dynamic, unified party. Similarly, if local party members decide not to reselect the present MP as their candidate in an election, it betrays disagreement and argument. Therefore, party members do not like this happening and most MPs can be sure that their local party will choose them again at the next election.

1.7. The modern situation

During the last forty or so years, the traditional confidence in the British political system has weakened. In 1950, Britain, despite the hard ships of the Second World War, could claim to be the richest and most stable large country in Europe.

Collectively, its people seemed to know what they wanted and what they believed in. They seemed to be sure of themselves.

This is no longer true. Britain is often rated as one of the poorest large countries in Europe, the policies of its governments have pulled in several different direction s, and its people tend to be pessimistic about the future (a loss of confidence). It is now commonplace for politicians and political commentators, when calling for a change in some matter, to compare the country unfavourably with some other European country.

In these circumstances, it is quite possible that some of the distinctive characteristics of British public life will change. The matter of identity cards is one area of possible change. The British have always been rather proud of not having them. This has been seen as proof of the British dedication to the rights of the individual. It has also helped to give British people a feeling of being different. But what is the good of being different if 'different' means 'worse'' There has been growing concern about increasing crime in the country, and this has resulted in much discussion about identity cards. Britain's fellow states in the European Union would like to see them introduced in the country. At the same time, there has been increasing pressure for a Freedom of Information Act.

Another possibility is that Britain will finally get a written constitution. An unwritten constitution works very well if everybody in the country shares the same attitudes and principles about what is most important in political life and about what people's rights and obligations are. In other words, it works very well in a society where everybody belongs to the same culture. However, in common with most other European countries today, Brita in is now multicultural.

This means that some sections of society can sometimes hold radically different ideas about these things. The case of Salman Rushdie is an excellent example of this situation (The Rushdie affair). As long as everybody in a country feels the same way, at the same time, about a case such as this, there is no real need to worry about inconsistencies in the law. There is no need to question the existence of laws or to update them. They are just interpreted in changing ways to match the

change in prevailing opinion. This is what, up to now, has happened in Britain. But the Rushdie case is an example of what can happen when radically opposing views on a matter prevail in different sections of society at the same time. In these circumstances the traditional *laissez-faire* attitude to the law can become dangerous.

QUESTIONS

1. In what sense could the British attitude to politics be described as *'happily cynical'*? Are people equally cynical in your country? Are they as happy about it?
2. In most Parliaments in the western world, the place where representatives debate is in the form of a semi-circle. But in Britain, there are two sets of rows facing each other. Why is the British Parliament different in this respect?
3. How does the role of political parties in Britain differ from their role in your country?
4. Why does Britain not have a written constitution? Does it need one?

Part 2. GOVERNMENT AND POLITICS

2.1. The appearance

The position of the monarch in Britain is a perfect illustration of the contradictory nature of the constitution. From the evidence of written law only the Queen has almost absolute power, and it all seems very undemocratic. The American constitution talks about *'government of the people for the people by the people'*. There is no law in Britain which says anything like that. In fact, there is no legal concept of 'the people' at all.

Every autumn, at the state opening of Parliament, Elizabeth II, who became Queen in 1952, makes a speech. In it, she says what 'my government' intends to do in the coming year. And indeed, it is her government, not the people's. As far as the law is concerned, she can choose anybody she likes to run the government for her. There are no restrictions on whom she picks as her Prime Minister. It does not have to be somebody who has been elected. She could choose me; she could even choose *you*. The same is true for her choices of people to fill some hundred or so other ministerial positions. And if she gets fed up with her ministers, she can just dismiss them. Officially speaking, they are *'all servants of the Crown'* (not servants of anything like 'the country' or 'the people'). She also appears to have great power over Parliament. It is she who summons a Parliament, and she who dissolves it before a general election. Nothing that Parliament has decided can become law until she has agreed to it.

Similarly, it is the Queen, and not any other figure of authority, who embodies the law in the courts. In the USA, when the police take someone to court to accuse them of a crime, the court records show that 'the people' have accused that person. In other countries it might be 'the state' that makes the accusation. But in Britain it is 'the Crown'. This is because of the legal authority of the monarch. And when an accused person is found guilty of a crime, he or she might be sent to one of 'Her Majesty's' prisons.

Other countries have 'citizens'. But in Britain people are legally described as 'subjects' – subjects of Her Majesty the Queen. Moreover, there is a principle of English law that the monarch can do nothing that is legally wrong. In other words, Queen Elizabeth is above the law.

The house of Windsor

Windsor is the family name of the royal family. The press sometimes refers to its members as 'the Windsors'. Queen Elizabeth is only the fourth monarch with this name. This is not because a 'new' royal family took over the throne of Britain four reigns ago. It is because George V, Elizabeth's grandfather, changed the family name. It was Saxe-Coburg Gotha, but during the First World War it was thought better for the king not to have a German sounding name.

The royal family

Queen Elizabeth the Queen Mother died at the age of 101 in 2002, the year of the pre sent Queen's Golden Jubilee. Her tours of bombed areas of London during the Second World War with her husband. King George Vl. made her popular with the British people. She remained the most consistently popular member of the royal family until her death.

***Queen Elizabeth II** was born in 1926 and became Queen in 1952 on the death of her father, George VI, who had reigned since 1936 (when his elder brother, Edward VIII, gave up the throne). She is one of the longest reigning monarchs in British history. She is widely respected for the way in which she performs her du ties and is generally popular.*

***Prince Philip Mountbatten**, the Duke of Edinburgh, married the present Queen in 1997. In the 1960s and 1970s, his outspoken opinions on controversial matters were sometimes embarrassing to the royal family.*

***Princess Margaret,** the Queen's younger sister, died in 2002.*

***Prince Charles**, the Prince of Wales, was born in 1948.As the eldest son of Queen Elizabeth and Prince Philip, he is heir to the throne. He is concerned about the environment and about living conditions in Britain's cities. He sometimes makes speeches which are critical of aspects of modern life.*

***Princess Diana** married Prince Charles in 1981.The couple separated in 1992 and later divorced. Princess Diana died as the result of a car accident in 1997. She was a glamorous and popular figure during her lifetime.*

***Princess Anne,** the Queen's daughter (also known as the Princess Royal), was born in 1950. She separated from her husband after they had a little son and one daughter. She married again in 1992. She is widely respected for her charity work, which she does in a spirit of realism.*

***Prince Andrew**, the Duke of York, was born in 1960 and is the Queen's second son. He is divorced from his wife, Sarah Ferguson (who is known to the popular press as 'Fergie'. They have two daughters.*

***Prince Edward,** the Queen's youngest son, was born in 1964. He is involved in theatrical production. He married Sophie Rhys-ones in 1999. He and his wife are the Duke and Duchess of Wessex.*

***Prince William** (born 1982) and Prince Henry (born 1984) are the sons of Charles and Diana. William is next in line to the throne after his father.*

2.2. The reality

In practice, of course, the reality is very different. In fact, the Queen cannot choose anyone she likes to be Prime Minister. She has to choose someone who has the support of the majority of MPs in the House of Commons (the elected chamber

of the two Houses of Parliament). This is because the law says that 'her' government can only collect taxes with the agreement of the Commons, so if she did not choose such a person, the government would stop functioning.

In practice the person she chooses is the leader of the strongest party in the House of Commons. Similarly, it is really the Prime Minister who decides who the other government ministers are going to be (although officially the Prime Minister Simply 'advises' the monarch who to choose).

It is the same story with Parliament. Again, the Prime Minister will talk about 'requesting' a dissolution of Parliament when he or she wants to hold an election, but it would normally be impossible for the monarch to refuse this 'request'. Similarly, while, in theory, the Queen could refuse the royal assent to a bill passed by Parliament and so stop it becoming law – no monarch has actually done so since the year 1708. Indeed, the royal assent is so automatic that the Queen doesn't even bother to give it in person. Somebody else signs the documents for her.

In reality the Queen has almost no power at all. When she opens Parliament each year the speech she makes has been written for her. She makes no secret of this fact. She very obviously reads out the script that has been prepared for her, word for word. If she strongly disagrees with one of the policies of the government, she might ask the government minister s to change the wording in the speech a little beforehand, but that is all. She cannot actually stop the government going ahead with any of its policies

2.3. The role of the monarch

What, then, is the monarch's role? Many opinions are offered by political and legal experts. Three roles are often mentioned. First, the monarch is the personal embodiment of the government of the country. This means that people can be as critical as they like about the real government, and can argue that it should be thrown out, without being accused of being unpatriotic. Because of the clear separation between the symbol of government (the Queen) and the actual government (the

ministers, who are also MPs), changing the government does not threaten the stability of the country as a whole.

Other countries without a monarch have to use something else as the symbol of the country. In the USA, for example, one of these is its flag, and to dam age the flag in any way is actually a criminal offence. Second, it is argued that the monarch could act as a final check on a government that was becoming dictatorial. If the government ever managed to pass a bill through Parliament which was obviously terribly bad and very unpopular, the monarch could refuse the royal assent and the bill would not become law. Similarly, it is possible that if a Prime Minister who had been defeated at a general election (and so no longer commanded a majority in the House of Commons) were to ask immediately for another dissolution of Parliament (so that another election could take place), the monarch could refuse the request and dismiss the Prime Minister.

Third, the monarch has a very practical role to play. By being a figurehead and representing the country, Queen Elizabeth II can perform the ceremonial duties which heads of state often have to spend their time on. This way, the real government has more time to get on with the actual job of running the country.

2.4. The value of the monarchy

However, all these advantages are hypothetical. It cannot be proved that only a monarch can provide them. Other modern democracies manage perfectly well without one. The British monarchy is probably more important to the economy of the country (The economic argument) than it is to the system of government. Apart from this, the monarchy is very popular with the majority of the British people. The monarchy gives British people a symbol of continuity, and a harmless outlet for the expression of national pride. Even in very hard times it has never seemed likely that Britain would turn to a dictator to get it out of its troubles. The grandeur of its monarchy may have been one of the reasons for this.

Occasion s such as the state opening of Parliament, the Queen's official birth day, royal weddings, and ceremonial events such as the changing of the guard make

up for the lack of colour and ceremony in most people's daily lives (There is no tradition of local parades as there is in the USA, and very few traditional local festivals survive as they do in other European countries). In addition the glamorous lives of 'the royals' provide a source of entertainment that often takes on the characteristics of a television soap opera. When, in 1992, it became known that Prince Charles and his wife Princess Diana were separating, even the more 'serious' newspapers discussed a lot more than the possible political implications. *The Sunday* Times published a 'five-page royal separation special'.

2.5. The future of the monarchy

For the last 250 years, the British monarchy as an institution has only rarely been a burning political issue. Only occasionally has there been debate about the existence of the monarchy itself. Few people in Britain could be described as either 'monarchists' or 'anti-monarchists', in the sense in which these terms are often used in other countries. Most people are either vaguely in favour or they just don't care one way or the other. There is, however, a great deal of de bate about what kind of monarchy Britain should have. During the last two decades of the twentieth century, there has been a general cooling of enthusiasm. The Queen herself remains popular. But the various marital problems in her family have lowered the prestige of royalty in many people's eyes. The problem is that, since Queen Victoria's reign, the public have been encouraged to look up to the royal family as a model of Christian family life.

The change in attitude can be seen by comparing Queen Elizabeth's 25th anniversary as Queen with her 40th anniversary. In 1977, there were neighbourhood street parties throughout the country, most of them spontaneously and voluntarily organized. But in 1992, nothing like this took place. On 20 November 1992, a fire damaged one of the Queen's favourite homes to the value of £60 million. There were expression s of public sympathy for the Queen. But when the government announced that public money was going to pay for the repairs, the sympathy quickly turned to

anger. The Queen had recently been reported to be the richest woman in the world, so people didn't see why she shouldn't pay for them herself.

It is, in fact, on the subject of money that 'anti-royalist' opinions are most often expressed. In the early nineties even some Conservative MPs, traditionally strong supporters of the monarchy, started protesting at how much the royal family was costing the country. For the whole of her long reign Elizabeth II had been exempt from taxation. But, as a response to the change in attitude, the Queen decided that she would start paying taxes on her private income. In addition, Civil List payments to some members of the royal family were stopped. (The Civil List is the money which the Queen and some of her relatives get from Parliament each year so that they can carry out their public duties). For most people, the most notable event marking Queen Elizabeth's 40th anniversary was a television programme about a year in her life which showed revealing details of her private family life. In the following year parts of Buckingham Palace were, for the first time, opened for public visits (to raise money to help pay for the repairs to Windsor Castle). These events are perhaps an indication of the future royal style – a little less grand, a little less distant.

QUESTIONS

1. Why does the British Prime Minister continue to 'advise' and 'request' the Queen, when everybody knows that he or she is really telling her what to do?
2. The attitude of the British people towards their royal family has changed over the last quarter of the twentieth century. In what way has it changed, and what demonstrates that there has been a change' Why do you think this has happened'
3. Would you ad vise the British to get rid of their monarchy?
4. Do you have a monarch in *your* country, or someone who fulfils a similar role' If you do, how does their position compare with that of the British monarch' If you don't, do you think your country would benefit from having a figure head who could perform the functions of a monarch?
5. Would you ad vise the British to get rid of their monarchy?
6. Do you have a monarch in *your* country, or someone who fulfils a similar role' If you do, how does their position compare with that of the British monarch' If you don't, do you think your country would benefit from having a figure head who could perform the functions of a monarch?

Part 3. The government

Who governs Britain? When the media talk about 'the government' they usually mean one of two things. The term 'the government' can be used to refer to all of the politician s who have been appointed by the monarch (on the advice of the Prime Minister) to help run government departments (there are several politicians in each department) or to take on various other special responsibilities, such as managing the activities of Parliament. There are normally about a hundred members of 'the government' in this sense. Although there are various ranks, each with their own titles (Ministers and departments), members of the government are usually known as 'ministers'. All ministers come from the ranks of Parliament, most of them from the House of Commons. Unlike in the USA and in some other countries in Europe, it is rare for a person from outside Parliament to become a minister (And when this does happen, the person concerned is quickly found a seat in one of the two Houses.).

The other meaning of the term 'the government' is more limited. It refers only to the most powerful of these politicians, namely the Prime Minister and the other members of the cabinet. There are usually about twenty people in the cabinet (though there are no rules about this). Most of them are the heads of the government departments. Partly as a result of the electoral system, Britain, unlike much of western Europe, normally has 'single-party government'. In other words, all members of the government belong to the same political party. Traditionally, British politicians have regarded coalition government (with several parties involved) as a bad idea. Since the formation of modern political parties in the nineteenth century, Britain has had a total of only twenty-on e years of coalition governments (1915–1922 and 1931–1945). Even when, for brief periods in the 1970s, no Single part y had a majority of seats in the House of Commons, no coalition was formed. There was a 'minority government' instead.

The habit of Single-party government has helped to establish the tradition known as collective responsibility. That is, every member of the government,

however junior, shares the responsibility for every policy made by the government. This is true even if, as is often individual government members may hold different opinions, but they are expected to keep these private. By convention, no member of the government can criticize government policy in public. Any member who does so must resign.

Ministers and departments

Most heads of government departments have the title 'Secretary of State' (as in, for example, 'Secretary of State for the Environment'). The minister in charge of Britain 's relations with the outs ide 'world is known to everybody as the 'Foreign Secretary'. The one in charge of law and order inside the country is the 'Home Secretary'. Their departments are called the Foreign and Commonwealth Office and the Home Office respectively (the words' exterior' and 'interior' are not used). The words 'secretary' and 'office' reflect the history of government in Britain in which government departments were at one time pan of the domestic arrangements of the monarch. Another important person is the 'Chancellor of the Exchequer', who is the head of the Treasury (in other words, a son of Minister of Finance).

3.1. The cabinet

Obviously, no government wants an important member of its party to start criticizing it. This would lead to divisions in the party. Therefore, the leading politicians in the governing party usually become members of the cabinet, where they are tied to government policy by the convention of collective responsibility. The cabinet meets once a week and takes decision s about new policies, the implementation of existing policies and the running of the various government departments. Because all government member s must be seen to agree, exactly who says what at these meetings is a closely guarded secret. Reports are made of the meetings and circulated to government departments. They summarize the topics discussed and the decisions taken, but they never refer to individuals or what they said.

To help run the complicated machinery of a modern government, there is an organization called the cabinet office. It runs a busy communication network, keeping ministers in touch with each other and drawing up the agendas for cabinet meetings. It also does the same things for the many cabinet committees. These committee s are appointed by the cabinet to look into various matters in more detail than the individual members of the cabinet have the time (or knowledge) for. Unlike members of ' the government' itself the people on these committees are not necessarily politicians.

3.2. The Prime Minister

The position of a British Prime Minister (PM) is in direct contrast to that of the monarch. Although the Queen appears to have a great deal of power, in reality she has very little. The PM, on the other hand, appears not to have much power but in reality has a very great deal indeed. The Queen is, in practice, obliged to give the job of Prime Minister to the person who can command a majority in the House of Commons. This norm ally means the leader of the party with the largest number of MPs. From one point of view, the PM is no more than the fore most of Her Majesty's political servants. The traditional phrase describes him or her as primus inter pares" (Latin for 'first among equals'). But in fact the other ministers are not nearly as powerful. There are several reasons for this. First, the monarch's powers of patronage (the power to appoint people to all kind s of jobs and to confer honours on people) are, by convention, actually the PM's powers of patronage. The fiction is that the Queen appoints people to government jobs 'on the advice of the Prime Minister'. But what actually happens is that the PM simply decides. Everybody knows this. The media do not even make the pretence that the PM has successfully persuaded the Queen to make a particular appointment, they simply state that he or she has made an appointment.

The strength of the PM's power of patronage is apparent from the modern phenomenon known as the 'cabinet reshuffle'. For the past thirty years it has been the habit of the PM to change his or her cabinet quite frequently (at least once every

two years). A few cabinet members are dropped, and a few new members are brought in, but mostly the existing members are shuffled around, like a pack of card s, each getting a new department to look after.

The second reason for a modern PM's dominance over other ministers is the power of the PM's public image. The mass media has tended to make politics a matter of personalities. The details of policies are hard to understand. An individual, constantly appearing on the television and in the newspapers, is much easier to identify with.

Everybody in the country can recognize the Prime Minister, while many cannot put a name to the faces of the other ministers. Asa result the PM can, if the need arises, go 'over the heads' of her ministers and appeal directly to the public.

Third, all ministers except the PM are kept busy looking after their government departments. They don't have time to think about and discuss government policy as a whole, But the PM does, and cabinet committees usually rep on directly to him or her, not to the cabinet as a whole. Moreover, the cabinet office is directly under the PM's control and works in the same building. As a result, the PM knows more about what is going on than the other ministers do. Because there is not enough time for the cabinet to discuss most matters, a choice has to be made about what will be discussed. And it is the PM who makes that choice. Manners that are not discussed can, in effect, be decided by the PM. The convention of collective responsibility then means that the rest of the government have to go along with whatever the PM has decided.

The cabinet

The history of the cabinet is a good example of the tendency to secrecy in British politics. It started in the eighteenth century as an informal grouping of important ministers and officials of the royal household. It had no formal recognition. Officially speaking, the government was run by the Privy Council, a body of a hundred or more people (including those belonging to 'the cabinet'), directly responsible to the monarch (but not to each other). Over the years, the

cabinet gradually took over effective power. The Privy Council is now a merely ceremonial organization with no power. Among others, it includes all the present ministers and the most important past ministers.

In the last hundred years, the cabin et has itself become more and more 'official' and publicly recognized. It has also grown in size, and so is now often too rigid and formal a body to take the real decisions. In the last fifty years, there have been unofficial 'inner cabinets' (comprising the Prime Minister and a few other important ministers). It is thought that it is here, and in cabinet committees, that much of the real decision-making takes place.

No 10 Downing Street

Here is an example of the traditional fiction that Prime Ministers are not especially important people. Their official residence doe s not have a special name. Nor, from the outside, does it look special. It is not even a detached house! Inside, though it is much larger than it looks. The cabinet meets here and the cabinet office works here. The PM lives 'above the shop' on the top floor.

The Chancellor of the Exchequer lives next door, at No. II, and the Government Chief Whip at No 12 , so that the whole street is a lot more important than it appears. Still. there is something very domestic about this arrangement. After the government loses an election all three ministers have to throw out their rubbish and wait for the furniture vans to turn up, just like anybody else moving house.

The PM also has an official country residence to the west of London, called 'Chequers.

3.3.The civil service

Considering how complex modern states are, there are not really very many people in a British 'government' (as defined above). Unlike some other countries (the USA for example), not even the most senior administrative jobs change hands when a new government comes to power. The day-to-day running of the government and

the implementation of its policy continue in the hands of the same people that were there with the previous government – the top rank of the civil service. Governments come and go, but the civil service remains. It is no accident that the most senior civil servant in a government department has the title of 'Permanent Secretary'.

Unlike politicians, civil servants, even of the highest rank, are unknown to the larger public. There are probably less than 10,000 people in the country who, if you asked them, could give you the names of the present secretary to the cabinet (who runs the cabinet office) or the present head of the home civil service; still fewer know the name s of more than one of the present permanent secretaries.

For those who belong to it, the British civil service is a career. Its most senior positions are usually filled by people who have been working in it for twenty years or more. These people get a high salary (higher than that of their ministers), have absolute job security (unlike their ministers) and stand a good chance of being awarded an official honour. By comparison, ministers, even those who have been in the same department for several years, are still new to the job. Moreover, civil servants know the secrets of the previous government which the present minister is unaware of.

For all these reasons, it is often possible for top civil servants to exercise quite a lot of control over their ministers, and it is sometimes said that it is they, and not their ministers, who really govern the country. There is undoubtedly some truth in this opinion. Indeed, an interesting case in early 1994 suggests that civil servants now *expect* to have a degree of control. At this time, the association which rep resents the country's top civil servants made an official complaint that four government ministers 'verbally abused' their civil service advisers and generally treated them 'with contempt'. It was the first time that such a complaint had been made. It seemed that the unprecedentedly long period of government by the same party had shifted the traditional balance of power.

However, the British civil service has a (largely) deserved reputation for absolute political impartiality. Many ministers have remarked on the struggle for power between them and their top civil servants, but very few have ever complained

of any political bias. Top civil servants know that their power depends on their staying out of politics' and on their being absolutely loyal to their present minister.

Modern criticism of the civil service does not question its loyalty but its efficiency. Despite reforms, the top rank of the civil service is still largely made up of people from the same narrow section of society – people who have been to public school and then on to Oxford or Cambridge, where they studied subjects such as history or classical languages. The criticism is therefore that the civil service does not have enough expertise in matters such as economics or technology and that it lives too much in its own closed world, cut off from the concerns of most people in society. In the late twentieth century, ministers tried to overcome these perceived deficiencies by appointing experts from outside the civil service to work on various projects and by having their own political advisers working alongside

3.4. Central and local government

Some countries, such as the USA and Canada, are federal. They are made up of a number of states, each of which has its own government with its own powers to make laws and collect taxes. In these countries the central governments have powers only because the states have given them powers. In Britain it is the other way around. Local government authorities (generally known as 'councils') only have powers because the central government has given them powers.

Indeed, they only exist because the central government allows them to exist. Several times in the last hundred years British governments have reorganized local government, abolishing some local councils and bringing new ones into existence.
The system of local government is very similar to the system of national government. There are elected representatives, called councilors (the equivalent of MPs). They meet in a council chamber in the Town Hall or County Hall (the equivalent of Parliament), where they make policy which is implemented by local government officers (the equivalent of civil servants). Most British people have far more direct dealings with local government than they do with national government. Local councils traditionally manage nearly all public services. Taken together, they

employ three times as many people as the national government does. In addition, there is no system in Britain whereby a national government official has responsibility for a particular geographical area. (There is no one like a 'prefect' or 'governor) In practice, therefore, local councils have traditionally been fairly free from constant central interference in their day to day work.

Local councils are allowed to collect one kind of tax. This is a tax based on property. (All other kinds are collected by central government.) It used to be called 'rates' and was paid only by those who owned proper ty. Its amount varied according to the size and location of the property. In the early I 990S it was replaced by the 'community charge' (known as the 'poll tax ') . This charge was the same for everybody who lived in the area covered by a council. It was very unpopular and was quickly replaced by the 'council tax', which is based on the estimated value of a property and the number of people living in it. Local councils are unable to raise enough money in this way for them to provide the services which central government has told them to provide. In addition, recent governments have imposed upper limit s on the amount of council tax that councils can charge and now collect the taxes on business properties themselves (and then share the money out between local councils). As a result, well over half of a local council's income is now given to it by central government.

The modern trend has been towards greater and greater control by central government. This is not just a matter of controlling the way local government raises money. There are now more laws governing the way councils can conduct their affairs. On top of this, schools and hospitals can now 'opt out' of local-government control. Perhaps this trend is inevitable now that national party politics dominates local politics. Successful independent candidates (candidates who do not belong to a political party) at local elections are becoming rarer and rarer. Most people now vote at local elections according to their national party preferences, if they bother to vote at all, so that these elections become a kind of opinion poll on the performance of the national government

Counties, boroughs, parishes

Counties *are the oldest divisions of the country in England and Wales. Most of them existed before the Norman conquest. They are still used today for local government purposes, although a few have been 'invented' more recently (e.g. Hum berside) and others have no function in government but are still used for other purposes. One of the se is Middlesex, which covers the western pan of Greater London (letters are still addressed 'Middx.') and which is the name of a top-class cricket team. Many counties have 'shire' in their name (e.g. Hertfordshire, Hampshire, Leicestershire).'Shires' is what the counties were originally called.*

Boroughs *were originally towns that had grown large and important enough to be given their own government, free of control by the county. These days, the name is used for local government purposes only in London, but many towns still proudly describe themselves as Royal Boroughs.*

Parishes *were originally villages cent red on a local church. They became a unit of local government in the nineteenth century. Today they are the smallest unit of local government in England. The name 'parish ' is still used in the organization of the main Christian churches in England.*

The Greater London Council. The story of the Greater London Council (GLC) is *an example of the struggle for power between central and local government, In the early 1980s Britain had a right-wing Conservative government, At a time when this government was unpopular, the left-Wing Labour party in London won the local election and gained control of the GLC The Labour-controlled GLC then introduced many measures which the national government did not like (for example. it reduced fares on London's buses and increased local taxes to pay for this).*
The government decided to abolish the GLC Using its majority in the House of Commons, it was able to do this. The powers of the GLC were either given to the

thirty two boroughs of London, or to special committees. It was not until the year 2000 that a Single governmental authority for the whole of London came into existence again and the city got its first ever directly elected mayor.

3.5. Local government services

Most of the numerous services that a modern government provides are run at local level in Britain. These include public hygiene and environmental health inspection, the collecting of rubbish from outside people's houses (the people who do this are euphemistically known as 'dustmen'), and the cleaning and tidying of all public places (which is done by ‘street sweepers’). (The organization of local government). They also include the provision of public swimming pools, which charge admission fees, and public parks, which do not.

The latter are mostly just green grassy spaces, but they often contain children's playgrounds and playing fields for sports such as football and cricket which can be reserved in advance on payment. Public libraries are another well-known service (Public libraries). Anybody can go into one of these to consult the books, newspapers and magazines there free of charge. If you want to borrow books and take them out of the library, you have to have a library card or ticket (these are available to people living in the area). Sometimes CDs and video cassettes are also available for hire. The popularity of libraries in Britain is indicated by the fact that in a country without identity cards, a person's library card is the most common means of identification for someone who does not have a driving licence.

QUESTIONS

1. Do you think the theory of collective responsibility is a good one? Does it exist in your country?
2. What would be the equivalent titles in your country for: Chancellor, Home Secretary, Foreign Secretary?
3. A British Prime Minister has no status in law which puts him or her above other politicians. So why are modern British PMs so powerful?

4. How does the relationship between central and local government in Britain compare with that in your country?
5. Local government in Britain is responsible for most of the things that affect people in everyday life. So why do you think so few people bother to vote in local elections in Britain?

Part 4. Parliament

The activities of Parliament in Britain are more or less the same as those of the Parliament in any western democracy. It makes new laws, gives authority for the government to raise and spend money keeps a close eye on government activities and discusses those activities.

The British Parliament works in a large building called the Palace of Westminster (popularly known as 'the Houses of Parliament'). This contains offices committee rooms, restaurants, bars, libraries and even some places of residence. It also contains two larger rooms. One of these is where the House of Lords meets, the other is where the House of Commons meets. The British Parliament is divided into two 'houses', and its members belong to one or other of them, although only members of the Commons are normally known as MPs (Members of Parliament). The Commons is by far the more important of the two houses.

4.1. The atmosphere of Parliament

Look at the picture of the inside of the meeting room of the House of Commons (The House of Commons). Its design and layout differ from the interior of the parliament buildings in most other countries. These differences can tell us a lot about what is distinctive about the British Parliament.

First, notice the sealing arrangements. There are just two rows of benches facing each other. On the left of the picture are the government benches, where the MPs of the governing party sit. On the right are the opposition benches. There is no opportunity in this layout for a reflection of all the various shades of political opinion (as there is with a semi-circle). According to where they sit MPs are seen to be either 'for ' the government (supporting it) or against it. This physical division is emphasized by the table on the floor of the Ho use between the two rows of benches. The Speaker's chair, which is raised some way off the floor, is also here. From this commanding position, the Speaker chairs, the debates (The Speaker). The arrangement of the benches encourages confrontation between government and opposition. It also reinforces psychologically the reality of the British two-party system. There are no 'crossbenches' for MPs who belong neither to the governing party nor the main opposition party. In practice these MPs sit on the opposition benches furthest from the Speaker's chair (at the bottom right of the picture).

The Speaker *Anybody who happened to be watching the live broadcast of Parliament on 27 April 1992 was able to witness an extraordinary spectacle. A fem ale MP was physically dragged, apparently against her will, out of her seat on the back benches by fellow MPs and was forced to sit in the large chair in the middle of the House of Commons. What the House of Commons was actually doing was appointing a new Speaker. The Speaker is the person who chairs and controls discussion in the House, decides which MP is going to speak next and makes sure that the rule s of procedure are followed. (If they are not, the Speaker has the power to demand a public apology from an MP or even to ban an MP from the House for a number of days).*

It is a very important position. In fact, the Speaker is, officially the second most important 'commoner' (non-aristocrat) in the kingdom after the Prime Minister. Hundreds of years ago, it was the Speaker's job to communicate the decisions of the Commons to the King (that is where the title 'Speaker' comes from). As the king was often very displeased with what the Commons had decided, this was not a pleasant task. As a result, nobody wanted the job. They had to be forced to take n. These days, the position is a much safer one, bur the tradition of dragging an unwilling Speaker to the chair has remained. The occasion in 1992 was the first time that a woman had been appointed Speaker, so that MPs had to get used to addressing not 'Mr. Speaker', as they had always done in the past, but 'Madam Speaker' instead. Once a Speaker has been appointed, he or she agrees to give up all party politics and remains in the job for as long as he or she want s it.

Second, the Commons has no 'front', no obvious place from which an MP can address everybody there. MPs simply stand up and speak from wherever they happen to be sitting. Third, notice that there are no desks for the MPs. The benches where they sit are exactly and only that benches, just as in a church. This makes it physically easy for them to drift in and out of the room, which is something that they frequently do during debates. Fourth, notice that the House is very small. In fact, there isn't enough room for all the MPs. There are more than 650 of them, but there is seating for less than 400. A candidate at an election is said to have won 'a seat' in the Commons, but this 'seat' is imaginary. MPs do not have their 'own' place to sit. No names are marked on the benches. MPs just sit down wherever (on 'their' side of the House) they can find room.

All these features result in a fairly informal atmosphere. Individual MPs, without their own 'territory' (which a personal seat and desk would give them), are encouraged to co-operate. Moreover, the small size of the House, together with the lack of a podium or dais from which to address it, means that MPs do not normally speak in the way that they would at a large public rally. MPs normally speak in a conversational tone, and because they have nowhere to place their notes while

speaking, they do not normally speak for very long either! It is only on particularly important occasions, when all the MPs are present, that passionate oratory is sometimes used.

One more thing should be noted about the design of the House of Commons. It is deliberate. Historically, it was an accident: in medieval times, the Commons met in a church and churches of that time often had rows of benches facing each other. But after the House was badly damaged by bombing in 194 I, it was deliberately rebuilt to the old pattern (with one or two modern comforts such as central heating added). This was because of a belief in the two-way' for and against' tradition, and also because of a more general desire for continuity. The ancient habits are preserved today in the man y customs and detailed rules of procedure which all new MPs find that they have to learn. The most noticeable of these is the rule that forbids MPs to address one another directly or use personal names. All remarks and questions must go ' through the Chair'. An MP who is speaking refers to or asks a question of' the honourable Member for Winchester' or 'my right honourable friend'. The MP for Winchester may be sitting directly opposite, but the MP never says 'you'. These ancient rules were originally formulated to take the 'heat' out of debate and decrease the possibility that violence might break out. Today, they lend a touch of formality which balances the informal aspects of the Commons and further increases the feeling of MPs that they belong to a special group of people.

4.2. An MP's life

The comparative informality of the Commons may partly result from the British belief in amateurism. Traditionally, MPs were not supposed to be specialist politicians. They were supposed to be ordinary people giving some of their time to representing the people. Ideally, they came from all walks of life, bringing their experience of the everyday world into Parliament with them. This is why MPs were not even paid until the early twentieth century. Traditionally, they were supposed to be doing a public service, not making a career for themselves of course, this tradition meant that only rich people could afford to be MPs so that, although they did indeed

come from a wide variety of background s, these were always backgrounds of power and wealth. Even now, British MPs do not get paid very much in comparison with many of their European counterparts. Moreover, by European standards, they have incredibly poor facilities. Most MPs have to share an office and a secretary with two or more other MPs.

The ideal of the talented amateur does not, of course, reflect modern reality. Politics in Britain in the last forty years has become professional. Most MPs are full-time politicians, and do another job, if at all, only part-time. But the amateur tradition is still reflected in the hour s of business of the Commons. They are 'gentleman's hours'. The House does not sit in the morning. This is when, in the traditional ideal, MPs would be doing their ordinary work or pursuing other interests outside Parliament. From Monday to Thursday, the House does not start its business until 14.30 (on Friday it starts in the morning, but then finishes in the early afternoon for the weekend). It also gives itself long holidays: four weeks at Christmas, two each at Easter and Whit sun (Pentecost), and about eleven weeks in the summer (from the beginning of August until the middle of October). But this apparently easy life is misleading. In fact, the average modern MP spends more time at work than any other professional in the country. From Monday to Thursday, the Commons never 'rises' (i.e. finishes work for the day) before 22.30 and sometimes it continues sitting for several hours longer. Occasionally, it debates through most of the night. The Commons, in fact, spends a greater total amount of time sitting each year than any other Parliament in Europe.

MPs' mornings are taken up with committee work, research, preparing speeches and dealing with the problems of constituent s (the people they represent). Weekends are not free for MPs either. They are expected to visit their constituencies (the areas they represent) and listen to the problems of anybody who wants to see them. It is an extremely busy life that leaves little time for pursuing another career. It does not leave MPs much time for their families either. Politicians have a higher rate of divorce than the (already high) national average.

The parliamentary day in the Commons from Mondays to Thursdays
14.30 – Prayers
14.35 – Question time
15.30 – Any miscellaneous business, such as a statement from a minister after which the main business of the day begins. On more than half of the days, this means a debate on a proposal for a new law known as a 'bill'. Most of these bill s are introduced by the government but some days in each year are reserved for 'private members' bills'; that is, proposals for laws made by individual MPs. Not many of these become law, because there is not enough interest among other MPs and not enough lime for proper discussion of them.
22.00 – Motion on the adjournment: the main business of the day stops and MPs are allowed to matter for general discussion.
22.30 – The House rises (usually).

4.3. Parliamentary business

The basic procedure for business in the Commons is a debate on a particular proposal, followed by a resolution which either accepts or rejects this proposal. Sometimes the resolution just expresses a view point, but most often it is a matter of framing a new law or of approving (or not approving) government plans to raise taxes or spend money in certain ways. Occasionally, there is no need to take a vote, but there usually is, and at such times there is a 'division'.

That is, MPs have to vote for or against a particular proposal. They do this by walking through one of two corridors at the side of the House – one is for the 'Ayes' (those who agree with the proposal) and the other is for the 'Noes' (those who disagree). But the resolutions of the Commons are only part of its activities. There are also the committees. Some committees are appointed to examine particular proposals for laws, but there are also permanent committees whose job is to investigate the activities of government in a particular field. These committees comprise about forty members and are formed to reflect the relative strengths of the parties in the Commons as a whole. They have the power to call certain people, such as civil servants, to come and answer their questions. They are becoming a more and more important part of the business of the Commons.

4.4.The party system in Parliament

Most divisions take place along party lines. MPs know that they owe their position to their party, so they nearly always vote the way that their party tells them to. The people who make sure that MPs do this are called the Whips. Each of the two major parties has several MPs who perform this role. It is their job to inform all MPs in their party how they should vote. By tradition, if the government loses a vote in Parliament on a very import ant matter, it has to resign. Therefore, when there is a division on such a matter, MPs are expected to go to the House and vote even if they have not been there during the debate.

The Whips act as intermediaries between the backbenchers and the frontbenchers of a party. They keep the party leadership informed about backbench opinion. They are powerful people. Because they 'have the ear' of the party leaders, they can have an effect on which backbencher s get promoted to the front bench and which do not. For rea son s such as this, 'rebellions' among a group of a party's MPs (in which they vote against their party) are very rare.

Sometimes the major parties allow a 'free vote', when MPs vote according to their own beliefs and not according to party policy. Some quite important decisions, such as the abolition of the death penalty and the decision to allow television cameras in to the Commons, have been ma de in this way.

Frontbenchers and backbenchers

Although MPs do not have their own personal seats in the Commons, there are two seating areas reserved for particular MPs. These areas are the front benches on either side of the House. These benches are where the leading members of the governing party (i.e. ministers) and the leading members of the main opposition party sit. These people are thus known as 'frontbenchers' MPs who do not hold a government post or a post in the shadow cabinet are known as 'backbenchers'.

4.5. How a bill becomes a law

Before a proposal for a new law starts its progress through Parliament, there will have been much discussion. If it is a government proposal, Green and White Papers will probably have been published explaining the ideas behind the proposal. After this lawyers draft the proposal into a bill, most bills begin life in the House of Commons, where they go through a number of stages.

1. ***First reading.***
   This is a formal announcement only, with no debate

2. ***Second reading.***
   The house debates the general principles of the bill and, in most cases, takes a vote.

3. ***Committee stage.***
   A committee of MPs examines the details of the bill and votes on amendments (changes) to parts of it.

4. ***Report stage.***
   The House considers the amendments.

5. ***Third reading.***
   The amended bill is debated as a whole.

6. ***The bill is sent to the House of Lords,*** where it goes through the same stages. (If the Lords make new amendments, these will be considered by the Commons.),

7. ***After both Houses have reached agreement****,* the bill receives the royal assent and becomes an Act of Parliament which can be applied as part of the law.

4.6. The House of Lords

A unique feature of the British parliamentary system is its hereditary element. Unlike MPs members of the House of Lords (known as 'peers') are not elected. They are members as of right. In the case of some of them, this 'right' is the result of their being the holder of an inherited aristocratic title .The House of Lords is therefore a relic of earlier, undemocratic, times. The fact that it still exists is perhaps typically British. It has been allowed to survive but it has had to change, losing most of its power and altering its composition in the process.

The House of Lords (like the monarchy) has little, if any, real power any more. All proposals must have the agreement of the Lords before they can become law. But the power of the Lords to refuse a proposal for a law which has been agreed by the Commons is now limited. After a period which can be as short as six months the proposal becomes law anyway, whether or not the Lords agree. The composition of the Lords has changed since 1958, when it became possible to award 'life peerages' through the honours system. Entitlement to sit in the Lords does not pass to the children of life peers. The life peerage system has established itself as a means of finding a place in public life for distinguished retired politicians who may no longer wish to be as busy as MPs in the Commons, but who still wish to voice their opinions in a public forum. At the time of writing, four of the last five Prime Ministers, as well as about .300 past ministers and other respected politicians, have accepted the offer of a life peerage. Political parties are, in fact, especially keen to send their older members who once belonged to the leadership of the party to the House of Lords. It is a way of rewarding them with prestige while at the same time getting them out of the way of the present party leaders in the Commons, where their status and reputation might otherwise create trouble for party unity. Informally, this practice has become known as being 'kicked upstairs'. As a result of the life peerage system there are more than 300 people in the House of Lord s who are not aristocrats and who have expertise in political life. In fact, as a result of recent reforms, these life peers now form a majority at its sittings.

The modern House of Lords is a forum for public discussion. Because its members do not depend on party politics for their position, it is sometimes able to bring import ant matters that the Commons has been ignoring into the open. More importantly, it is the place where proposals for new laws are discussed in great detail much more detail than the busy Commons has time for – and in this way irregularities or in consistencies in these proposals can be removed before they become law. More important still, it is argued, the Lords is a check on a government that, through its control of the Commons, could possibly become too dictatorial. Few people in politics are perfectly happy with the present arrangement. Most people

agree that having two Houses of Parliament is a good idea, and that this second house could have a more useful function if it were constituted in a different way (without the hereditary element). However, at this time, nobody can agree on what would be the best way to reform the composition of the second house, and so, despite recent reforms which have reduced the hereditary element, it remains as a fascinating (but valuable) anachronism in a modern state.

Lords legal and spiritual

As well as life peers, there are two other kinds of peer in the House of Lords who do not have seats there by hereditary right, but because of their position. First, there are the twenty-six bishops of the Church of England. Second, there are the Lords of Appeal (known as the 'Law Lords'), the twenty or so most senior judges in the land. By tradition, the House of Lords is the final court of appeal in the country. In fact, however, when the Lords acts in this role, it is only the Law Lords who vote on the matter.

Reforming the House of Lords

In 1910 the Liberal government proposed heavy taxes on the rich. The House of Lords rejected the proposal. This rejection went against a long-standing tradition that the House of Commons had control of financial matters. The government then asked the king for an election and won it. Again, it passed its tax proposals through the Commons, and also a bill limiting the power of the Lords. Again, the Lords rejected both bills, and again the government won another election. It was a constitutional crisis.

What was to happen? Revolution? No. What happened was that the king let it be known that if the Lords rejected the same bills again, he would appoint hundreds of new peers who would vote for the bills enough for the government to have a majority in the Lords. So, in 1911, rather than have the prestige of their House destroyed in this way, the Lords agreed to both bills, including the one that limited their own powers. From that time, a bill which had been agreed in the Commons for three years in a row could become law without the agreement of the Lords. This period of time was further reduced in 1949.

EXERCISES

1. Find in the text the following concepts, check your ability to explain them in English, and add them to your working vocabulary:

the throne speech, the Bar, the Woolsack, backwoodsmen, the Baby of the House, Lords Spiritual, Lords Temporal, life peers, law lords.

2. **Write out from the text the sentences or their parts, which contain the words and phrases given below and translate them into Ukrainian:**

the presiding officer, to be allotted, to attend the sittings, to lead nowhere, to hold up.

3. Explain in English what is meant by:

a recess, a session, a quorum, hereditary peers, the Royal Dukes, political football, legislative initiative, the right of veto.

QUESTIONS

1. Where would an MP of the Scottish Nationalist party probably sit in the House of Commons?
2. In what ways do the seating arrangements, general facilities and pay for British MPs differ from those of parliamentary representatives in your country? Why are they different?
3. Many MPs in modern times are experts in various fields of government. Because of the complexity of modern government, this is something which seems to be necessary. But it could be said to have disadvantages, too. What do you think these disadvantages are?
4. When the Commons decide to vote, they do not vote immediately. Instead, a 'division bell' rings throughout the Palace of Westminster, after which MPs have ten minutes in which to vote. Why?
5. Many of the members of the House of Lords are hereditary aristocrats. Why do the British put up with such an undemocratic element in their parliamentary system?

6. Why is the House of Lords called the oldest part of British Parliament?
7. From what place do the members of the House of Commons listen to the throne speech of the Queen?
8. Why is the chair of Lord Chancellor called the "Woolsack"?
9. Do the Lords receive salary for their parliamentary work?
10. What is the difference between Spiritual and Temporal Lords, and between life peers and hereditary peers?
11. Holders of what titles are included in the notion "hereditary peers"? What is the difference between them?
12. In what sense is the House of Lords an undemocratic institution?
13. Can you explain why the House of Lords has more advocates than critics, in spite of being "undemocratic"?
14. Can you mention one or two shortcomings of democracy?
15. Do you understand the meaning of the expression "political football"? What is it?
16. Do the Lords ever use their right of legislative initiative? Why not?
17. How can the Lords influence the political and economic situation in the country?
18. In what field have the Lords more power than the Commons?

Part 5. ELECTIONS

In the 2001 election, the Labour party received only four out of every ten votes, but it won more than six out of every ten seats in the House of Commons. It won two-and-half times as many seats as the Conservative party, even though it received less than on e-and a half times as many votes. The Liberal Democrat party did very badly out of the system. It got almost a fifth of the vote, but won only one in thirteen of the seats in the Commons. And yet it was much luckier than it had been in the past. The arithmetical absurdity of the system becomes clear when we compare the fortunes of the Liberal Democrats this time with their fortunes in the 1992 election. On that occasion, it got the same proportion of the total vote but fewer than half the number of seats. What's going on? As is often the case with British institutions, the apparently illogical figures are the result of history.

5.1. The system

Unlike in any other country in the world the system of political representation that is use d in Britain evolved before the coming of democracy. It also evolved before national issues became more important to people than local ones. In theory, the House of Commons is simply a gathering of people who each represent a particular place in the kingdom. Origin ally, it was not the concern of anybody in government as to how each representative was chosen. That was a matter for each town or county to decide for itself. Not until the nineteenth century were laws passed about how elections were to be conducted.

This system was in place before the development of modern political parties. These days, of course, nearly everybody votes for a candidate because he or she belongs to a particular party. But the tradition remains that an MP is first and foremost a representative

Of a particular locality. The result of this tradition is that the electoral system is remarkably simple. It works like this. The country is divided into a number of areas of roughly equal population (about 9000), known as constituencies. Anybody

who wants to be an MP must declare himself or herself as a candidate in one of these constituencies. On polling day (the day of the election), voters go to polling stations and are each given a single piece of paper (the ballot paper) with the names of the candidates for that constituency (only) on it. Each voter then puts a cross next to the name of one candidate. After the polls have closed, the ballot papers are counted. The candidate with the largest number of crosses next to his or her name is the winner and becomes the MP for the constituency. And that's the end of it. There is no preferential voting (if a voter chooses more than one candidate, that ballot paper is 'spoiled' and is not counted); there is no counting of the proportion of votes for each party (all votes cast for losing candidates are simply ignored); there is no extra allocation of seats in Parliament according to party strengths. At the 2001 election, there were 659 constituencies and 659 MPs were elected. It was called a general election, and of course control of the government depended on it, but in formal terms it was just 659 separate elections going on at the same time.

If we add the votes received for each party in these two constituencies together we find that the Liberal Democrats got more votes than Conservative or Labour. And yet, these two parties each won a seat while the Liberal Democrats did not. This is because they were not first in either constituency. It is coming first that matters. In fact, the system is known as the 'first-past-the-post' system (an allusion to horse-racing).

5.2.Formal arrangements

In practice, it is the government which decides when to hold an election. The law says that an election has to take place at least every five years. However, the interval between elect ions is usually a bit shorter than this . A part y in power does not normally wait until the last possible moment. For example, the Labour government called the 20 0 1 election after only four years. When a party has a very small majority in the House of Commons, or no majority at all, the interval can be much shorter.

After the date of an election has been fixed people who want to be candidates in a constituency have to deposit £ 1000 with the Returning Officer (the person responsible for the conduct of the election in each constituency). They get this money back if they get 1% of the votes or more. The local associations of the major parties will have already chosen their candidates and will pay the deposits for them. However, it is not necessary to belong to a party to be a candidate. It is a curious feature of the system that, legally speaking, parties do not exist. That is to say, there is no written law which tries to define them or regulate them. The law allows candidates if they wish to include a short 'political description' of themselves on the ballot paper. In practice, of course, most of these descriptions simply state 'Conservative', 'Labour' or 'Liberal Democrat'. But they can actually say anything that a candidate wants them to say.

To be eligible to vote a person must be at least eighteen years old and be on the electoral register. This is compiled every year for each constituency separately. People who have moved house and have not had time to get their names on the electoral register of their new constituency can arrange to vote by post. Nobody, however, is obliged to vote.

5.3.The campaign

British elections are comparatively quiet affairs. There is no tradition of large rallies or parades as there is in the USA. However, because of the intense coverage by the media, it would be very difficult to be in Britain at the time of a campaign and not realize that an election was about to take place.

The campaign reflects the contrast between the formal arrangements and the political reality. Formally, a different campaign takes place in each constituency. Local newspaper s give coverage to the candidates; the candidates themselves hold meetings; party supporters stick up poster s in their windows; local party workers spend their time canvassing.

Canvassing. *This is the activity that occupies most of the time of local party workers during an election campaign. Canvassers go from door to door, calling on as many*

houses as possible and asking people how they in tend to vote. They rarely make any attempt to change people's minds, but if a voter is identified as 'undecided', the party candidate might later attempt to pay a visit. The main purpose of canvassing seems to be so that, on election day, transport can be offered, if needed, to those who claim to be supporters. (This is the only form of material help that parties are allowed to offer voters). It also allows party workers to estimate how well they are doing on election day. They stand outside polling stations and record whether their supporters have voted. If it looks as If these people are not going to bother to vote, party workers might call on them to remind them to do so. Canvassing is an awful lot of work for very little benefit. It is a kind of election ritual.

The amount of money that candidates are allowed to spend on their campaign s is strictly limited. They have to submit detailed accounts of their expenses for inspection. Any attempt to influence voter s improperly is outlawed. But the reality is that all these activities and regulations do not usually make much difference. Nearly everybody votes for a candidate on the basis of the party which he or she represents, not because of his or her individual qualities or political opinions. Few people attend candidates 'meetings; most people do not read local newspapers. In any case, the size of constituencies means that candidates cannot meet most voters, however energetic ally they go from door to door.

It is at a national level that the real campaign takes place. The parties spend millions of pounds advertising on hoardings and in newspapers. By agreement, they do not buy time on television as they do in the USA. Instead, they are each given a number of strictly timed 'party election broadcasts'. Each party also holds a daily televised news conference. All of this puts the emphasis on the national party personalities rather than on local candidates. Only in the 'marginals' – constituencies where only a small shift in voting behaviour from last time would change the result – might the qualities of an individual candidate, possibly, affect the outcome.

5.4. Polling day

General elections always take place on a Thursday. They are not public holidays. People have to work in the normal way, so polling stations are open from seven in the morning till ten at night to give everybody the opportunity to vote. The only people who get a holiday are schoolchildren whose schools are being used as polling stations. Each voter has to vote at a particular polling station. After being ticked off on the electoral register, the voter is given a ballot paper. Elections on the British mainland are always very fairly conducted. Northern Ireland, however, is a rather different story. There, the political tensions of so many years have had a negative effect on democratic procedures. Matters have improved since the 1960, but the traditional, albeit joking, slogan in Ulster on polling day is 'vote early and vote often' – that is, try to vote as many times as you can by impersonating other people.

After the polls close, the marked ballot papers are taken to a central place in the constituency and counted. The Returning Officer then makes a public announcement of the votes cast for each candidate and declares the winner to be the MP for the constituency. This declaration is one of the few occasions during the election process when shouting and cheering may be heard.

5.5.Election night

The period after voting has become a television extravaganza. Both BBC and TV start their programmes as soon as voting finishes. With millions watching, they continue right through the night. Certain features of these 'election specials', such as the 'swingomerer' have entered popular folklore. The first excitement of the night is the race to declare. It is a matter of local pride for some constituencies to be the first to announce their result. Doing so will guarantee that the cameras will be there to witness the event. If the count has gone smoothly, this usually occurs at just after 11.00 p.m. By midnight, after only a handful of results have been declared experts

(with the help of computers) will be making prediction s about the composition of the newly elected House of Commons. Psephology (the study of voting habits) has become very sophisticated in Britain so that, although the experts never get it exactly right. they can get pretty close.

By two in the morning at least half of the constituencies will have declared their result s and. unless the election is a very close one (as, for example, in 1974 and 1992), the experts on the television will now be able to predict with confidence which party will have a majority in the House of Commons and therefore which party leader is going to be the Prime Minister.

Some constituencies, however, are not able to declare their results until well into Friday afternoon. This is either because they are very rural (mostly in Scotland or Northern Ireland) and so it takes a long time to bring all the ballot papers together or because the race has been so close that one or more 'recounts' have been necessary. The phenomenon of recounts is a clear demonstration of the ironies of the British system. In most constituencies it would not make any difference to the result if several thousand ballot papers were lost. But in a few, the result depends on a handful of votes. In these cases, candidates are entitled to demand as many recounts as they want until the result is beyond doubt. The record number of recounts is seven (and the record margin of victory is just one voter).

5.6. Recent results and the future

Since the middle of the twentieth century, the contest to form the government has effectively been a straight fight between the Labour and Conservative parties. As a general rule, the north of England and most of the inner areas of English cities return Labour MPs to Westminster, while the south of England and most areas outside the inner cities have a Conservative MP. Which of these two parties forms the government depend s on which one does better in the suburbs and large towns of England. Scotland used to be good territory for the Conservatives. This changed, however, during the I980s and the vast majority of MPs from there now represent Labour. Wales has always returned mostly, Labour MPs. Since the 1970s, the

respective nationalist parties in both countries have regularly won a few seats in Parliament.

Traditionally, the Liberal part y was also relatively strong in Scotland and Wales (and was sometimes called the party of the 'Celtic fringe'). Its mod ern successor, the Liberal Democrat party, is not so geographically restricted and has managed to win some seats all over Britain, with a concentration in the southwest of England. Northern Ireland always has about the same proportion of Protestant Unionist MPs and Catholic Nationalist MPs (since the 1970^{S}, about two-thirds the former, the third the latter). The only element of uncertainty is how many seats the more extremist (as opposed to the more moderate) parties will win on either side of this invariant political divide.

The swingometer. *This is a device used by television presenters on election night. It indicates the percentage change of support from one party to another party since the previous election the 'swing'. Individual constituencies can be placed at certain points along the swingometer to show how much swing is necessary to change the party affiliation of their MPs. The swingometer was first made popular by Professor Raben McKenzie on the BBC's coverage of the 1964 election . Over the years, it has become more colourful and complicated. Most people enjoy it but say they are confused by it.*

In the thirteen elections from 1945 to 1987, the Conservatives were generally more successful than Labour. Although Labour achieved a majority on five occasions, on only two of these was the majority comfortable. On the other three occasions it was so small that it was in constant danger of disappearing as a result of by-election defeats. In the same period, the Conservatives won a majority seven times, nearly always comfortably. Then, in the 1992 election, the Conservatives won for the fourth time in a row – the first time this had been achieved for more than 160 years. Moreover, they achieved it in the middle of an economic recession. This made many people wonder whether Labour could ever win again. It looked as if the swingometer's pendulum had stuck on the right. Labour's share of the total vote had generally decreased in the previous four decade s while support for the third party

had grown since the early 1970s. Many sociologists believed this trend to be in evitable because Britain had developed a middle-class majority (as opposed to its former working-class majority). Many political observers were worried about this situation. It is considered to be basic to the British system of democracy that power should change hands occasionally.

There was much talk about a possible reorganization of British politics, for example a change to a European-style system of proportional representation (so that Labour could at least share in a coalition government), or a formal union between Labour and the Liberal Democrats (so that together they could defeat the Conservatives). However, in 1997 the picture changed dramatically. Labour won the largest majority in the Ho use of Commons achieved by any party for 73 years and the Conservative share of the total vote was their lowest in 165 years. What happened? The answer seems to be that voting habits in Britain, reflecting the weakening of the class system, are no longer tribal. There was a time when the Labour party was regarded as the political arm of the trade unions, representing the working class of the country. Most working-class people voted Labour all their lives and nearly all middle-class people voted Conservative all their lives. The winning party at an election was the one who managed to get the support of the small number of 'floating voters', But Labour has now go t rid of its trade-union image. It is capable of winning as many middle-class votes as the Conservatives, so that the middle-class majority in the population, as identified by sociologists, does not automatically mean a Conservative majority in the House of Commons.

By elections. *Whenever a sitting MP can no longer fulfil his or her du ties, there has to be a special new election in the constituency which he or she represents. (There is no system of ready substitutes.). These are called by-elections and can take place at any time .They do not affect who runs the government, but they are watched closely by the media and the parties as indicators of the current level of popularity of the government. A by-election provides the parties with an opportunity to find a seat in Parliament for one of their important people. If a sitting MP dies, the*

opportunity presents itself; if not, an MP of the same party must be persuaded to resign. The way an MP resigns offers a fascinating example of the importance attached to tradition. It is considered wrong for an MP simply to resign; MPs represent their constituents and have no right to deprive them of this representation. So the MP who wishes to resign app lies for the post of Steward of the Chiltern Hundreds'. This is a job with no duties and no salary. Technically, however, it is 'an office of profit under the Crown', i.e. a job given by the monarch with rewards attached to it) .According to ancient practice, a person cannot be both an MP and hold a post of this nature at the same time because Parliament must be independent of the monarch . (This is why high ranking civil servants and army officers are not allowed to be MPs.) As a result, the holder of this ancient post is automatically disqualified from the House of Commons and the by-election can go ahead!

QUESTIONS

1. The British electoral system is said to discriminate against smaller parties. But look at the table at the beginning of this chapter again. How can it be that the very small parties had much better luck at winning parliamentary seats than the (comparatively large) Liberal Democrats?

2. In what ways is political campaigning in your country different from that in Britain as described in this chapter.

3. Is there a similar level of public interest in learning about election results in your country as there is in Britain? Does it seem to reflect the general level of enthusiasm about, and interest in politics which exist at other times – in Britain and in your own country?

4. Britain has single-member constituencies'. This means that one MP alone represents one particular group of voters (everybody in his or her constituency). Is this a good system? Or is it better to have several MPs representing the same area? What are the advantages and disadvantages of the two systems?

5. Do you think that Brita in should adopt the electoral system used in your country. Or perhaps you think that your country should adopt the system used in Britain? Or are the two different systems the right ones for the two different countries? Why?

SUGGESTIONS

If you can get British television or radio, watch or listen in on the night of the next British general election.

Part 6. International relations

The relationship between any country and the rest of the world can reveal a great deal about that country.

6.1. The end of empire

The map below shows the British empire in 1919, at the time of its greatest extent. By this time, however, it was already becoming less of an empire and more of a confederation. At the same international conference at which Britain acquired new possessions (formerly German) under the Treaty of Versailles, Australia, Canada, New Zealand and South Africa were all represented separately from Britain.

The real dismantling of the empire took place in the twenty-five years following the Second World War and with the loss of empire went a loss of power and status. These days, Britain's armed forces can no longer act unilaterally, without reference to the international community. Two events illustrate this. First, Suez. In 1956 Egypt, without prior agreement, took over the Suez canal from the international company owned by Britain and France. British and French military action to stop this was a diplomatic disaster. The USA did not support them and their troops were forced to withdraw. Second, Cyprus. When this country left the British empire, Britain became one of the guarantors of its independence from any other country. However, when Turkey invaded the island in 1974, British military activity was restricted to airlifting the personnel of its military base there to safety.

After the Second World War and throughout the 1950s, it was understood that a conference of the world's great powers involved the USA, the Soviet Union and Britain. However, in 1962, the Cuban missile crisis, one of the greatest threats to global peace since the war, was resolved without reference to Britain. By the 1970[S]

it was generally accepted that a 'superpower' conference involved only the USA and the Soviet Union.

Despite Britain's loss of power and status on the world stage, some small remnants of the empire remain .Whatever their racial origins, the inhabitants of Gibraltar, St Helena, the Ascension Islands, the Falklands/Malvina s and Belize have all wished to continue with the imperial arrangement (they are afraid of being swallowed up by their nearest neighbours). For British governments, on the one hand, this is a source of pride, but on the other hand it causes embarrassment and irritation: pride, because it suggests how beneficial the British imperial administration must have been; embarrassment, because the possession of colonial territories does not fit with the image of a modern democratic state; and irritation because it costs the British taxpayer money.

The old imperial spirit is not quite de ad. In 1982 the British government spent hundreds of millions of pounds to recapture the Falklands/Malvinas Islands from the invading Argentinians. We cannot know if it would have done so if the inhabitants had not been in favour of remaining British and if Argentina had not had a military dictatorship at the time. But what we do know is that the government's action received enormous popular support at home. Before the 'Falklands War', opinion polls showed that the government was extremely unpopular; afterwards, it suddenly became extremely popular and easily won the general election early in the following year.

The Commonwealth. *The dismantling of the British empire took place comparatively peacefully, so that good relations between Britain and the newly independent countries were established. As a result, and with the encouragement of Queen Elizabeth II, an international organization called the Commonwealth. composed of the countries that used to be pan of the empire, has continued to hold annual meetings. Some countries in the Commonwealth have even kept the British monarch as head of state. There are no formal economic or political advantages involved in belonging to the Commonwealth, but it has helped to keep cultural contacts alive, and does at least mean that every year the leaders of a sixth of the world's population sit down and talk together. Until quite recently it did have economic importance, with special trading agreements between members. But*

since Britain became a full member of the EEC, all but a few of these agreements have gradually been discontinued.

6.2. The armed forces

The loyalty of the leaders of the British armed forces to the government has not been in doubt since the Civil War (with the possible exception of a few years at the beg inning of the twentieth century. In addition, and with the exception of Northern Ireland, the arm y has only rarely been used to keep order within Great Britain in the last 100 years. 'National Service' (a period of compulsory military service for all men) was abolished in 1957. It had never been very popular. It was contrary to the traditional view that Britain should not have a large standing army in peacetime. Moreover, the end of empire, together with the increasing mechanization of the military, me an t that it was more important to have small, professional forces staffed by specialists.

The most obviously specialist area of the modern military is nuclear weapons. Since the 1950^{S}, the Campaign for Nuclear Disarmament (CND) has argued, on both moral and economic grounds, that Britain should cease to be a nuclear power. At certain periods the CND has had a lot of popular support (e- Greenhorn Common). However, this support has not been consistent. Britain still has a nuclear force, although it is tiny compared to that of the USA. The end of the 'Cold War' between the west and the Soviet Union at the end of I 9805 caused the British government to look for the 'peace dividend' and to reduce further the size of the armed forces. This caused protest from politicians and military professionals who were afraid that Britain would not be able to meet its 'commitments' in the world. These commitments, of course, arc now mostly on behalf of the United Nations or the European Union. There is still a feeling in Britain that the country should be able to make significant contributions to international peace keeping efforts. The reduction also caused bad feeling with in sect ions of the armed forces themselves. Its three branches (the Army, the Royal Navy and the Royal Air Force) have distinct traditions and histories that it was felt were being threatened. The army in particular

was unhappy when several famous old regiments, each with their own distinct traditions, were forced to merge with others. At one time, a number of upper-middle class families maintained a tradition down the generations of belonging to a particular regiment. Fewer and fewer such families exist today, However, a career in the armed forces is still highly respectable. In fact, Britain's armed force s arc one of the few institutions that its people admit to being proud of.

6.3. Transatlantic relations

Since the Second World War, British governments have often referred to the 'special relationship ' which exists between Britain and the USA. There have been occasional low points, such as Suez and when the USA invaded the Caribbean island of Grenada (a member of the British Commonwealth). But gene rally speaking it has persisted. It survived the Falklands War, when the USA offered Britain important material help, but little public support, and regained its strength in 1991 during the Gulf War against Iraq, when Britain gave more active material support to the Americans than any other European country.

Public feeling about the relationship is ambiguous. On the one hand, it is reassuring to be so diplomatically close to the most powerful nation in the world, and the shared language gives people some sense of brotherhood with Americans. On the other hand, there is mild bitterness about the sheer power of the USA. There is no dis trust, but remarks are often made about Britain being nothing more than the fifty-first state of the USA. Similarly, while some older people remember with gratitude the Americans who came to their aid in two world wars, others resent the fact that it took them so long to get involved!

In any case, the special relationship has inevitably declined in significance since Britain joined the European Community. In the world trade negotiations of the early 1990^{S}, there was nothing special about Britain 's position with regard to the USA – it was just pan of the European trading bloc. The opening of the Channel tunnel in 1994 has emphasized that Britain's links are now ma inly with Europe. Tourist statistics also point this way. In 1993, for the first time, it was not American

visitors who arrived in the greatest numbers, it was the French, and there were almost as many German visitors as Americans. The majority of visitors to Britain are now from Europe.

6.4. The sovereignty of the union: Europe

When the European Coal and Steel Community was formed in 1951, Britain thought it was an excellent ide a, but nothing to do with Britain! Long years of an empire based on sea power meant that the traditional attitude to Europe had been to encourage stability there, to discourage any expansionist powers there, but otherwise to leave it well alone.

As the empire disappeared, and the role of' the world's policeman' was taken over by the USA, the British government decided to ask for membership of the newly – formed European Communities. It took more than ten years for this to be achieved (in 1973). From the very start, the British attitude to membership has been ambiguous. On the one hand, it is seen as an economic necessity and a political advantage (increasing Britain's status as a regional power). The referendum on continued membership in 1975 (the first in British history) produced a two-to-one majority in favour. On the other hand, acceptance does not mean enthusiasm. The underlying attitude – that Britain is somehow special – has not really changed and there are fears that Britain is gradually giving up its autonomy. Changes in European domestic policy, social policy or sovereignty arrangements tend to be seen in Britain as a threat. Throughout the 1980s and 1990s it has been Britain more than any other member of the European Union (as it is now called) which has slowed down progress towards further European unity. Meanwhile, there is a certain amount of popular distrust of the Brussels bureaucracy. This ambiguous attitude can partly be explained by the fact that views about Britain's position in Europe cut across political party lines. There are people both for and against closer ties with Europe in both the main parties. As a result, 'Europe' has not been promoted as a subject for debate to the electorate. Neither party wishes to raise the subject at election time because to do so would expose divisions within that party (a sure vote-loser).

6.5. The sovereignty of the union: Scotland and Wales

There is another reason for a distrust of greater European cohesion among politicians at Westminster. It is feared that this may not just be a matter of giving extra power to Brussels. It may also be a matter of giving extra powers to the regions of Britain, especially its different nations. Until recently most Scottish people, although they insisted on many differences between themselves and the English, were happy to be part of the UK. But there has always been some resentment in Scotland about the way that it is treated by the central government in London. In the 1980s and early 1990s this resentment increased because of the continuation in power of the Conservative party for which only around a quarter of the Scottish electorate had voted.

Opinion polls consistently showed that between half and three quarters of the Scottish population wanted either 'home rule' (internal self-government) .within the UK or complete independence. The realization that, in the EU, home rule or even independence, need not mean isolation has caused the Scottish attitude to Europe to change. Originally, Scotland was just as cautious as England. But now the Scottish, as a group, have become the most enthusiastic Europeans in the UK. Scotland now has its own parliament which controls its internal affairs and even has the power to vary slightly the levels of income tax imposed by the UK government. It is not clear whether complete independence will eventually follow, but this is the policy of the Scottish National Party (SNP), which is well represented in the new parliament.

In Wales, the situation is different. The southern part of this nation is thoroughly Anglicied and the country as a whole has been fully incorporated into the English governmental structure for more than 400 years. Nationalism in Wales is felt mostly in the central and northern part of the country, where it tends to express itself not politically, but culturally. Many people in Wales would like to have greater control over Welsh affairs, but not much more than some people in some regions of England would like the same. Wales also now has its own assembly with responsibility for many internal affairs.

The sovereignty of the union: Northern Ireland In this section, the word 'Ulster' is used to stand for the British province of Northern Ireland. Politics here is dominated by the historic animosity between the two communities there. The Catholic viewpoint is known as 'nationalist' or 'republican' (in support of the idea of a single Irish nation and its republican government); the Protestant viewpoint is known as a little modern history is necessary to explain the present situation.

By the beg inning of the twentieth century, when Ireland was still part of the United Kingdom, the vast majority of people in Ireland wanted either home rule or complete independence from Britain. Liberal governments in Britain had accepted this and had attempted at various times to make it a reality. However, the one million Protestants in Ulster were violently opposed to this idea. They did not want to belong to a country dominated by Catholics. They formed less than a quarter of the total population of the country, but in Ulster they were in a 65% majority. After the First World War the British government partitioned the country between the (mainly Catholic) south and the (mainly Protestant) north, giving each part some control of its internal affairs. But this was no longer enough for the south. There, support for complete independence had grown as a result of the British government's savage repression of the 'Easter Rising' in 1916. War followed.

The eventual result was that the south became independent of Britain. Ulster, however, remained within the United Kingdom with its own Parliament and Prim e Minister. The Protestants had always had the economic power in the six counties. Internal self-government allowed them to take all the political power as well. Matters were arranged so that positions of official power were always filled by Protestants. In the late 1960s a Catholic civil rights movement began. There was violent Protestant reaction and frequent fighting broke out. In 1969 British troops were sent in to keep order. At first they were welcomed, particularly among the Catholics. But troops, inevitably, often act without regard to democratic rights. In the tense atmosphere, the welcome disappeared. Extremist organizations from both communities began committing acts of terrorism, such as shootings and bombings. One of these groups, the Provisional IRA, then started a bombing campaign on the

British mainland. In response, the British government reluctantly imposed certain measures not normally acceptable in a mod ern democracy, such as imprisonment without trial and the outlawing of organizations such as the IRA. The application of these measures caused resentment to grow. There was a hardening of attitudes in both communities and support for extremist political parties increased. There have been many efforts to find a solution to 'the troubles' (as they are known in Ireland). In 1972 the British government decided to rule directly from London. Over the next two decades most of the previous political abuses disappeared, and Catholics now have almost the same political rights as Protestants. In addition, the British and Irish governments have developed good relation s and new initiatives are presented jointly. The troubles may soon be over. However, despite reforms inequalities remain. At the time of writing, unemployment among Ulster's Catholics is the highest of any area in the UK, while that among its Protestants is one of the lowest. Members of the police force, the Royal Ulster Constabulary (RUC), are still almost entirely Protestant. Most of all, the basic divisions remain. The Catholics identify with the south. Most of them would like the Irish government in Dublin to have at least a share in the government of Ulster. In 1999 the Republic removed the part of its constitution which included a claim to the six counties. This has calmed Protestant fears about being swallowed up. In return for its gesture, the Republic now has a role to play in a number of all Ireland bodies which have been set up. Some Protestants still have misgivings about this initiative. It should be noted that the names 'loyalist' and 'unionist' are somewhat misleading. The Ulster Protestants are distinct from any other section of British society. While it is important to them that they belong to the United Kingdom, it is just as important to them that they do not belong to the Republic of Ireland. From their point of view, and also from the point of view of some Catholics, a place for Ulster in a federated Europe is a possible solution. In Ulster there is now a general disgust at the activities of extremists, and a strong desire for peace. At the time of writing, nearly all terrorist activities have ceased and a Northern Ireland government which includes representatives of all political views has been set up.

QUESTIONS

1. What indications can you find in this chapter that British people like to think of their country as an important and independent power in the world?

2. Would you say that the British people feel closer to the USA or the European Union'. What evidence do you have for your view?

3. The people of Scotland have changed from being 'anti-Europe' to being 'pro-Europe' in the last twenty years of the twentieth century. Why

4. In 1994, Prime Minister John Major announced that he would like to hold a referendum in Ulster on that area's future constitutional position. Some people said that the referendum should include the whole of Ireland. Which people do you think they were? Why did they say this?

5. Do you think that the present boundaries of the UK should remain as they are or should they change'. Do you think they will stay as they are?

Part 7.Brexit: What you need to know about the UK leaving the EU.

After months of negotiations, the UK and European Union finally agreed a deal that will define their future relationship, which comes into effect at 23.00GMT on 31 December.

- I thought the UK had already left the EU?

It has. The UK voted to leave the EU in 2016 and officially left the trading bloc - its nearest and biggest trading partner - on 31 January 2020. However, both sides agreed to keep many things the same until 31 December 2020, to allow enough time to agree to the terms of a new trade deal. It was a complex, sometimes bitter negotiation, but they finally agreed a deal on 24 December.

–So what changes on 1 January?

The deal contains new rules for how the UK and EU will live, work and trade together. While the UK was in the EU, companies could buy and sell goods across EU borders without paying taxes and there were no limits on the amount of things

which could be traded. Under the terms of the deal, that won't change on 1 January, but to be sure that neither side has an unfair advantage, both sides had to agree to some shared rules and standards on workers' rights, as well as many social and environmental regulations. You can read more detail on other aspects of the deal, including more on travel, fishing, and financial services.

- **What's in the Brexit deal?**

  Freedom to work and live between the UK and the EU also comes to an end, and in 2021, UK nationals will need a visa if they want to stay in the EU more than 90 days in a 180-day period.

  Northern Ireland will continue to follow many of the EU's rules in order to avoid a hardening of its border with the Republic of Ireland. This will mean however that new checks will be introduced on goods entering Northern Ireland from the rest of the UK. Now that it's no longer in the EU, the UK is free to set its own trade policy and can negotiate deals with other countries. Talks are being held with the US, Australia and New Zealand – countries that currently don't have free trade deals with the EU.

UK leader Boris Johnson signed the deal after the document was flown to the UK from Brussels in an RAF plane

–Will there be disruption at the borders?

There may not be new taxes to pay at the border, but there will be new paperwork, and the potential for it to cause delays is a serious concern. "This is the biggest imposition of red tape that businesses have had to deal with in 50 years,"

according to William Bain from the British Retail Consortium. The UK says it will delay making most checks for six months, to allow people to get used to the new system, but the EU will be checking paperwork and carrying out checks from day one. So if businesses are not prepared, or do not fill in the new paperwork correctly, it could cause delays and backlogs at ports like Dover.

The government has known about this for years, and has made plans to divert trade to other ports around the country and has built lorry parks in Kent, to avoid gridlock on the roads. It's difficult to predict what the scale of any disruption might be, but government minister Michael Gove has said that UK businesses should prepare for some "bumpy moments".

– Is this finally the end of having to hear about Brexit?

Sadly, no. Decisions are still to be made on data sharing and on financial services, and the agreement on fishing only lasts five years.

Also while the UK and EU have agreed to some identical rules now, they don't have to be identical in the future, and if one side takes exception to the changes, they can trigger a dispute, which could ultimately lead to tariffs (charges on imports) being imposed on some goods in the future.

Expect the threat of disputes to be a new constant in UK-EU relations.

What Brexit words mean

The last few years have seen many words and phrases enter our lives. We haven't used them here, but politicians do use them. Here's what some of them mean:

Transition period: The 11-month period following the UK's exit from the EU (finishing at the end of 2020), during which time the UK has followed EU rules, to allow leaders to make a deal.

Free trade: Trade between two countries, where neither side charges taxes or duties on goods crossing borders.

Level playing field: A set of rules to ensure that one country, or group of countries, doesn't have an unfair advantage over another. This can involve areas such as workers' rights and environmental standards. Free trade agreements like the Brexit deal often include level playing field measures.

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