

The United Kingdom

“Because they’re British!”



Historical Evolution of British Politics

- **Magna Carta**(1215) – King John agreed to consult the nobles before he made important decisions, in particular regarding taxes
- Limited government – restrictions on the monarch began with the Magna Carta

Historical Evolution of British Politics

- **The Glorious Revolution** (1688) – established Parliament as the ruling body. Signed between William & Mary and Parliament- known as the **Bill of Rights**



Legitimacy

- **Traditional-Gradualism**
- **Rational Legal-** democratic constitution and rule of law
- **Unwritten Constitution-** Magna Carta, English Bill of Rights, common law, legal codes, and customs

Political Culture

- **Noblesse Oblige**- The duty of the upper classes to take responsibility for the welfare of the lower classes
- Margaret Thatcher's administration challenged this by significantly cutting social services and social welfare programs

- majoritarian features



Political Beliefs & Values

- Through 1960s British political culture characterized by:
 - Trust
 - Deference to authority
 - Pragmatism
 - Harmony
 - High voter participation
 - The “Collectivist Consensus”



Collectivist Consensus

- Both Labour and Conservative parties supported the development of the modern welfare system
- **Beveridge Report** – adopted by both parties during the war; made all citizens eligible for health, unemployment, pension, and other welfare benefits
- **National Health Service (1948)** – created under the leadership of the Labour Party

Politics and Protest

- 1970s and 1980s
 - Less support for “collectivist consensus”
 - Support for free market economy
 - Decreasing support for labor unions
 - Increased violence in Northern Ireland

Voter Turnout



Political Culture

- Feeling of separation, in particular from the continent of Europe
- Sense of exceptionalism
- Euroscepticism
- Not isolation



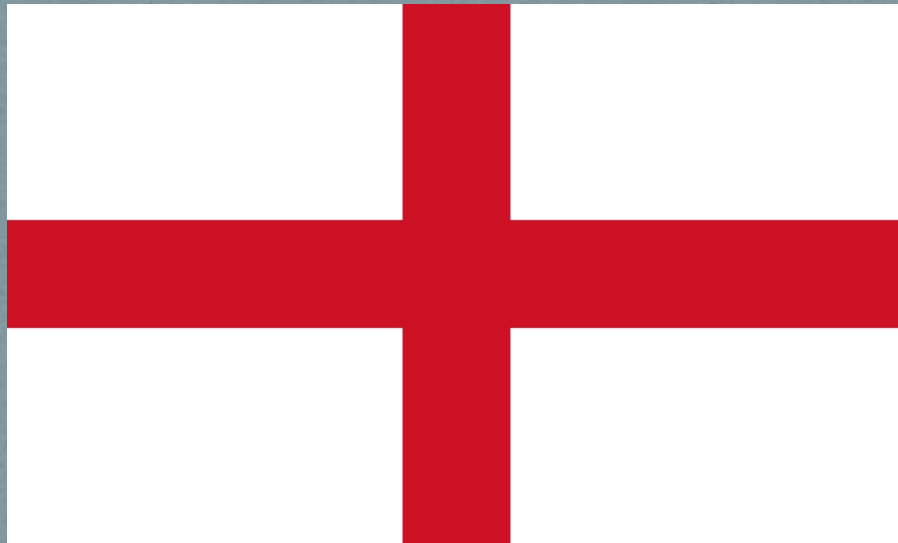
Political Culture: Multi-nationalism

- Although the UK has a relatively large amount of **cultural homogeneity** (Anglo/white), it is divided into four nations
 - England
 - Scotland
 - Wales
 - Northern Ireland



England

- Largest region of Great Britain
- Makes up 2/3 of the land mass
- English have dominated the other nationalities historically, and still hold a disproportionate share of political power



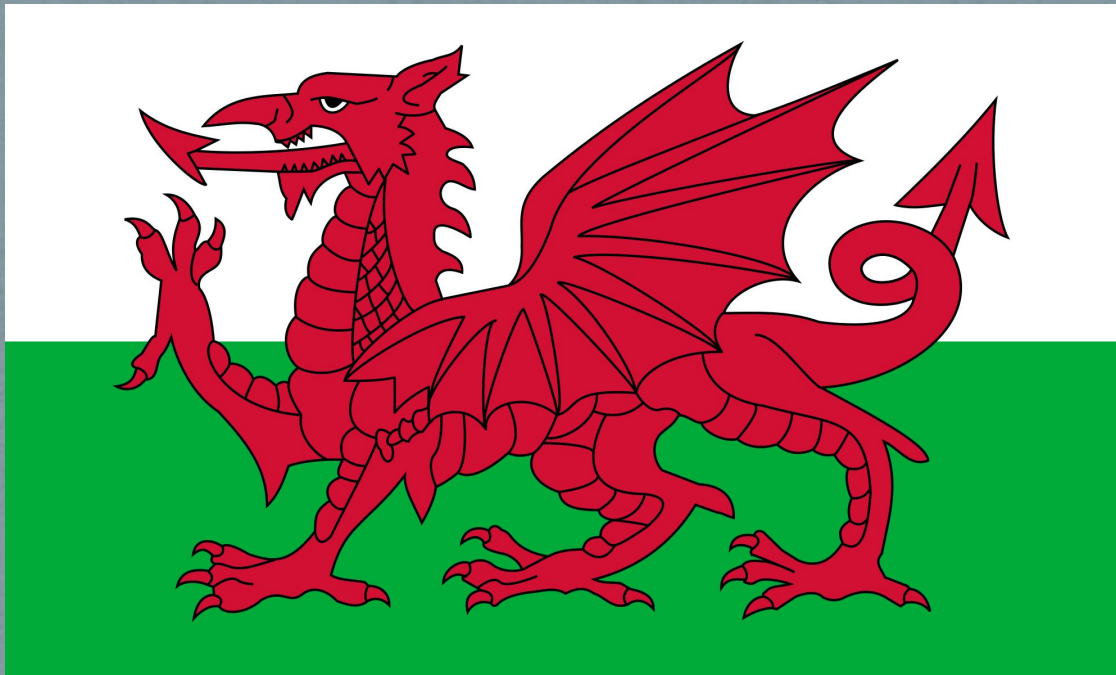
Scotland

- Strong sense of national identity
- Has its own flag
- Scottish National Assembly (devolution)
- Scottish National Party
- Proposed referendum on leaving the UK



Wales

- Plaid Cymru
- Strong sense of national pride reflected in its flag and Welsh language
- Welsh National Assembly (devolution)



Northern Ireland

- The Irish Republican Army (IRA) used terrorism against British officials and citizens
- **Sinn Fein** – political party of the IRA
- Under the 1999 Good Friday Agreement, the IRA decommissioned its weapons in exchange for some self rule.
- Northern Ireland Assembly (devolution)



Devolution

- British government is a unitary system (centralized control)
- **Devolution** – the turning over of some political power and autonomy to regional governments

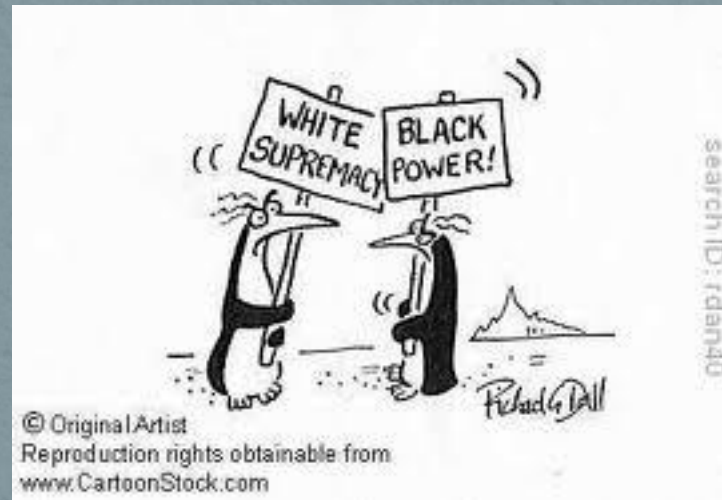


Devolution

- Tony Blair's New Labour Party instituted devolution
- In 1998, the *Good Friday Agreement* established an assembly for Northern Ireland
- In 1999, referendums in Scotland and Wales successfully passed, and *each established their own regional assemblies*: powers of taxation, education, and economic planning

Ethnic Minorities

- Make up about 8% of the British population
 - Indian (23%)
 - Pakistani (16%)
 - Afro-Caribbean (13%)
 - Black African (11%)



Education & Political Elite Recruitment

- Majority of Britain's political elites go to public boarding schools
- **Oxbridge** (Oxford-Cambridge) – two prestigious universities, political elite attend



Labour Party

- Early history of the party was defined by controversial **Clause 4** that called for nationalization of the “commanding heights” of British industry
- *To secure for the workers by hand or by brain the full fruits of their industry and the most equitable distribution thereof that may be possible upon the basis of the common ownership of the means of production, distribution, and exchange, and the best obtainable system of popular administration and control of each industry or service.*
- **Trade Union Council (TUC)** – a coalition of trade unions generally associated with the Labour Party, has traditionally been a force in British politics
- Growing moderation of the Labour Party was reflected by removal of Clause 4 in early 1990s
- Party on the left

Labour Party in 1990s

- Shift in policies toward more centrist views
- Moderate-centrist views have continued under leadership of and Tony Blair and Gordon Brown (1997-2010)
- Tony Blair adopted “Third Way” platform and created the “New Labour” Party

“Third Way”

- Devolution of regional power
- Reduced number of Lords
- Created mayor of London
- Continued privatization
- New Deal (welfare reform)



Boris Johnson, Mayor of London

Tony Blair



Conservative Party

- Party on the right
- Originally characterized by *Noblesse Oblige*
- Support the free market, but also support the welfare state
- Skeptical of further integration with Europe

Thatcherism

- Privatized business and industry
- Fewer increases in social welfare programs
- Strengthened national defense (staunch anticommunist)
- Got tough with labor unions



Thatcherism

- Returned to market economy
- Resisted complete integration into the European Union
- Replaced property tax on houses with a poll tax on individual adults
- Froze income tax increases

Margaret Thatcher



David Cameron



Liberal-Democratic Party

- Established 1974 - UK becomes multi-party system
- Attempted to create strong “in the middle” compromise to the two dominant parties (centrist)
- Has gained support on issues such as health, education, the environment, and the Iraq War
- Underrepresented in Commons due to FPTP/SMD

Other Parties

- **Scottish National Party**
- **Plaid Cymru** – Welsh nationalist party
- **Sinn Fein** – political arm of the IRA
- **National Front**-racist and nationalist

Voting Patterns

- Conservative Party
 - Middle and upper classes
 - Educated
 - England, mostly rural and suburban areas
- Labour Party
 - Working class
 - Urban and industrial areas (Manchester, Liverpool, Newcastle)

Interest Groups

- Between 1945-1980, business interests and trade union organizations fiercely competed for influence over the policy-making process
- **Trade Union Congress (TUC)** – represents coalition of unions, supports Labour Party, losing influence
- **Confederation of Business and Industry (CBI)** – a coalition of business groups and private interests, usually supportive of the Conservative Party
- **Quangos** - quasi-autonomous nongovernmental organizations

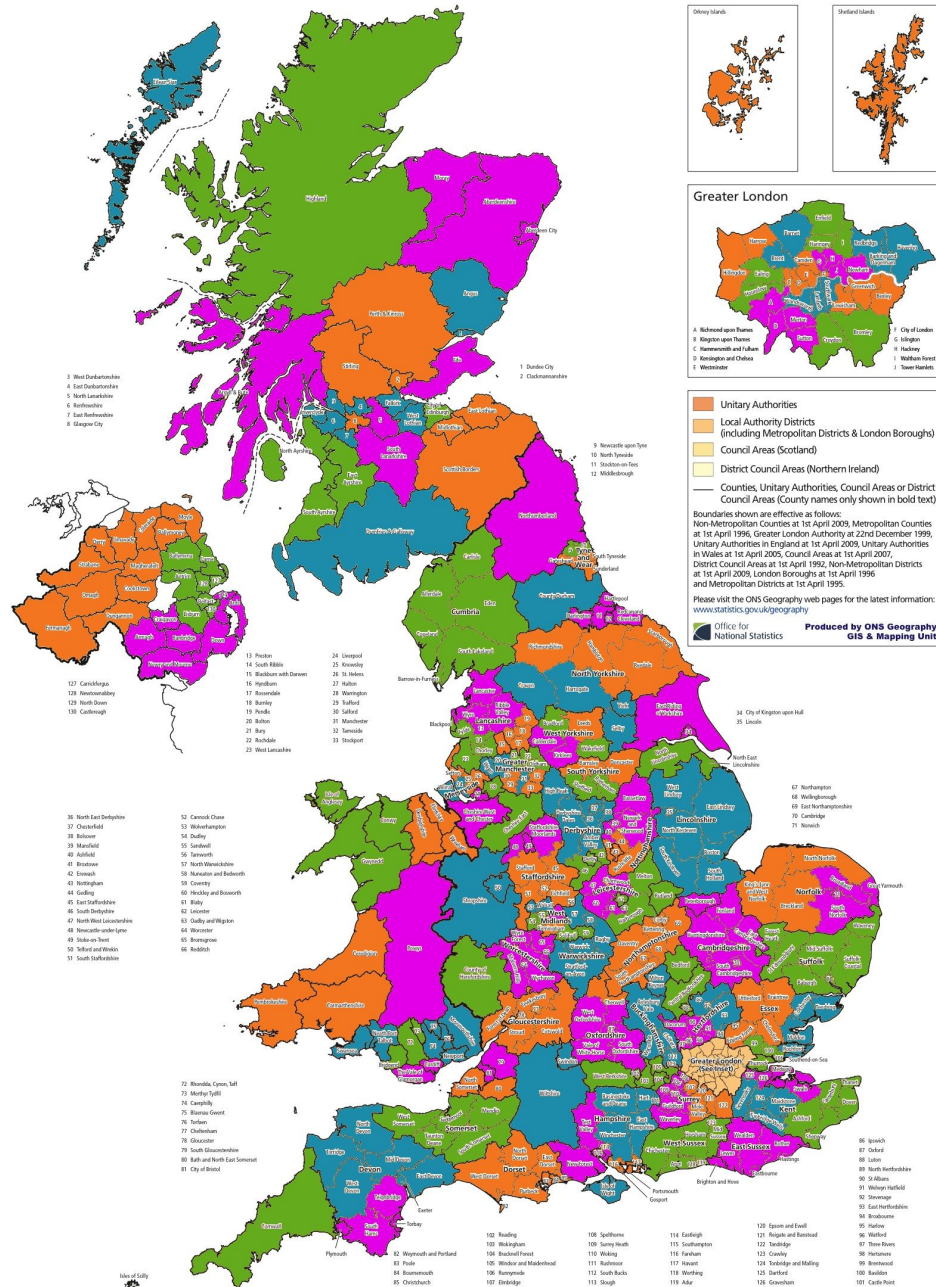
Media

- British newspapers reflect social class divisions
- They are divided between quality news and comments that appeal to the middle and upper classes, and mass circulation tabloids that target working and lower classes
- **British Broadcasting Corporation (BBC)** – government funded and guaranteed independence
 - Usually respectful of government officials

Tabloid Journalism



United Kingdom: Local Authority Districts, Counties and Unitary Authorities,¹ 2009



¹ Council Areas in Scotland and District Council Areas in Northern Ireland are equivalent to Unitary Authorities in England and Wales, but are shown separately.

Elections

- MPs are the only national officials that British voters elect

Used to be:

- Elections must be held at least every 5 years, but Prime Minister may call them earlier
- **Power to call elections very important** – the Prime Minister always calls elections when he or she thinks that the majority party has the best chance to win

Now:

Fixed-term Parliaments Act

Elections

- Winner-take-all
- FPTP/SMD-plurality
- Each party selects a candidate to run for each district
- MPs do not have to live in the district in which they are running, but they usually do; Party selects who runs in what districts

Elections

- Party leaders run from **safe districts** – or districts that the party almost always wins
- Political neophytes are selected to run in districts the party know it will lose

US v. British Elections

- United States
 - Parties are less powerful
 - Members must live in districts
 - Party leaders run in their respective districts
 - Individual votes for four officials on national level
 - About 50% voter turnout
 - FPTP/SMD; minor parties almost never win seats
- Great Britain
 - Party determines who runs where
 - Members do not have to live in their districts
 - Party leaders run in “safe districts”
 - Individual votes for only one official on the national level
 - About 60% voter turnout
 - FPTP/SMD; minor parties win seats but are underrepresented

Constitution

- No Formal Document
- Includes written documents and unwritten rules
 - Magna Carta
 - 1689 Bill of Rights
 - 1707 Act of Union
- Parliament is sovereign, the lower house can amend with simple majority vote
- No Constitutional Court
- 1998 - European Convention on Human Rights
- Some applaud unwritten Con for its flexibility and responsiveness to the majority.

The Monarchy

- Head of State
- Symbolic continuity of the British state
- Basically a paid civil servant that can only act on orders of the Cabinet
- Selects the head of state, but must be the leader of the majority party.
- Commander of armed forces but PM has power to declare wars and sign treaties.

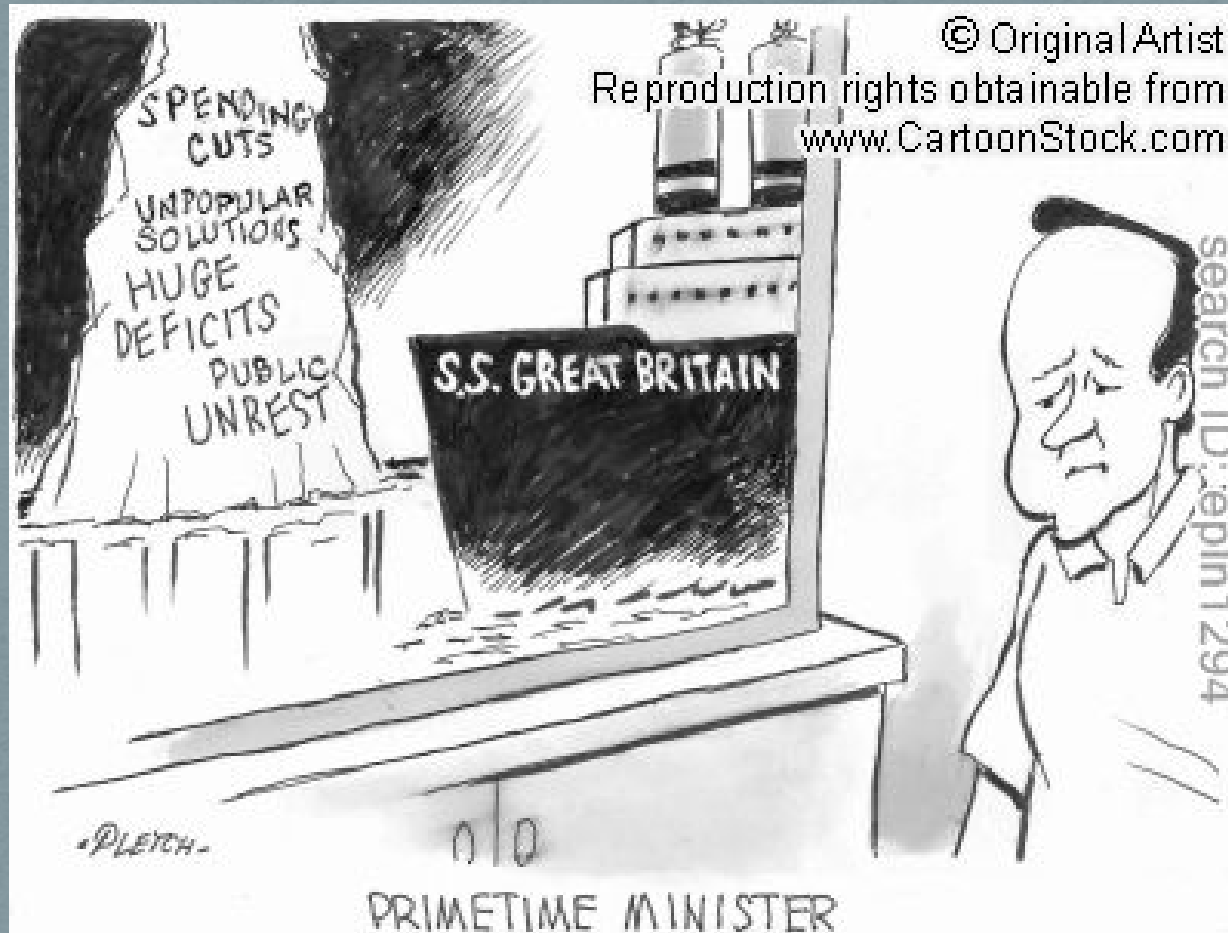


Prime Minister & Cabinet

- Prime Minister
 - “First among equals”
 - MP
 - Leader of majority party or coalition
 - Campaigns for and represents the party in parliamentary elections
 - Chooses cabinet ministers and important subordinate posts
 - Makes decisions in cabinet, with agreement of ministers
 - Shapes cabinet decisions into policy
- Cabinet
 - Center of policy-making in the British political system
 - Collective Responsibility
 - Target of lobbying by interest groups



Problems Facing the UK



Comparing Executives

- Prime Minister of UK

- Serves only as long as he/she remains leader of majority party
- Elected as MP
- Has an excellent chance of getting his/her programs past Parliament
- Cabinet members are always MPs and leaders of the majority party or coalition
- Cabinet members not experts in policy areas: rely on bureaucracy to provide expertise

- President of the US

- Elected every four years by an electoral college based on popular election
- Elected as president
- Has an excellent chance of ending up in gridlock with Congress
- Cabinet members usually don't come from Congress (although they may)
- Some expertise in policy areas; one criteria for their appointment; head vast bureaucracies

Parliament

House of Commons

- 650 members
- Party that receives the majority of the votes becomes the Majority Party in Parliament, the party with the second most votes becomes the “**loyal opposition**”
- Coalition government occurs when no party wins a majority - *hung Parliament*

House of Commons: Set-up

- Prime Minister sits on front bench of majority side, directly in the middle
- Directly across from the PM sits the leader of the “opposition” party
- Cabinet members sit on the front rows of the majority party side
- “**Shadow Cabinet**” – influential members of the opposition party sit facing Cabinet members of majority party on the opposing side
- **Backbenchers** – less influential members of the majority party (or coalition) sit in the rear benches
- **Crossbenchers**—less influential members of the minority party sit in the rear benches

House of Commons

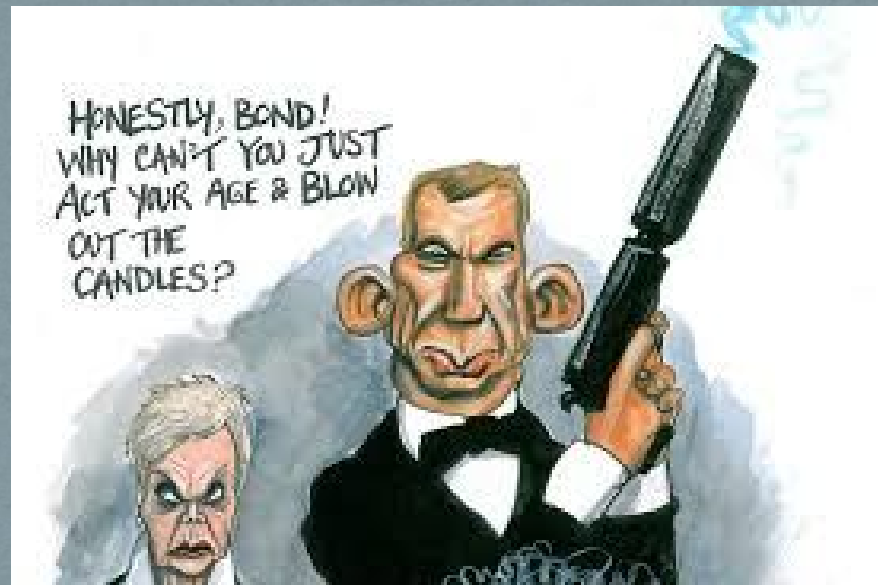


House of Commons: Debate

- **Government**—the Prime Minister and cabinet
- **Question Time/Question Hour** – the prime minister and his cabinet must defend themselves from inquisitive attacks from the opposition party as well as direct inquiry from members of his/her own party
- **Speaker of the House** – presides over the debates
- Because of a lack of checks & balances, Question Time serves as a “check” on government by the minority party

Party Discipline

- Party discipline very important in British politics
- A failed vote of confidence dissolves the government and the prime minister calls for new elections.



Vote of Confidence

- Vote on a key issue within the party
- If the vote fails, a vote of no confidence is held
- New elections for MPs must be held as soon as possible
- If the party loses a vote of confidence, all MPs lose their jobs, so there is plenty of motivation to vote the party line
- This is usually avoided by settling policy differences within majority party

Blair's Vote of Confidence

- Higher Education Bill
 - The bill proposed raising university fees, a measure criticized not only by the opposition, but by outspoken MPs from the Labour Party as well
 - The vote narrowly allowed Blair's government to remain in control of the Commons

Parliamentary Powers

- Debate and refine potential legislation
- Pass budget bills
- Oversee administration of laws (bureaucracy)
- Create new programs and positions
- Develop foreign policy



House of Lords

- **Hereditary peers**: hold seats that have been passed down through family ties over the centuries
- **Life peers**: people appointed to non hereditary positions as a result of distinguished service to Britain
- over 800 peers
- Lords have gradually declined in authority over last 4 centuries
- The House of Lords has been reduced by half

“Powers” of the House of Lords

- Delay legislation
- Debate *technicalities* of proposed bills
- Lords may add amendments to legislation, but House of Commons may delete their changes by a simple majority vote



House of Lords Reform



Bureaucracy: Civil Servants

- Top civil servants and bureaucrats usually stay with their departments, while ministers are party officials
- Top civil servants are experts and often have a great deal of input into policy-making
- Hundred of thousands of civil servants
- Administer laws and deliver public services
- Most do clerical and routine work for the bureaucracy

Judiciary

- Most judges are not MPs and few are active in party politics
- **Parliamentary sovereignty** has limited the development of judicial review
- **Constitutional Reform Act of 2005** – provides for a Supreme Court of the United Kingdom to take over the existing role of the law lords
- British courts can overturn government decisions that violate common law or previous acts of Parliament

Economy



- Has slowly declined throughout history
- Gradual shift from state run to privatization
- 2008 - Labour Party -
 - partially nationalized some private banks
 - Increased income taxes on the wealthy
- Refused to adopt the Euro





GOD Save THE QUEEN

SEX PISTOLS