



كلية الآداب والعلوم الانسانية
- بني ملال -

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Lecture 8: Monarchy in Britain

-It is important to point out that the British constitution is different from other constitutions. Unlike most countries, the British constitution is not contained within any simple document. Rather, it is formed by a statute as well as a law passed by parliament which can be mended at any time. The British constitution is partly formed by a common law based on customs. In addition to this, it is formed by a convention, a formal agreement.

-The British constitution can be easily changed by an act of parliament whenever it is convenient to create new customs, to vary or to abolish some. One of the weaknesses of this constitution resides in the fact that there is no evidence that the king or the queen cannot interfere in politics.

-Monarchy is deeply rooted in British culture. It is Britain's oldest institution created by man. Historically speaking, it existed since 1660 under William the first and has been broken once during the Cromwellian period. Over a thousand years ago, the king's right to rule was absolute. He dominated all the functions of government. But, now he is compelled to act upon advice of ministers commanding a majority in parliament.

-The queen of England is Elizabeth the second. She was born in April 1926. On the 20th November 1947, she married Philip Mountbatten, Duke of Edinburgh. On June 2nd 1953, she was crowned queen of England. In 1977, she celebrated her silver Jubilee.

-The queen's titles are as follows:

She is the head of the common wealth, defender of faith, supreme governor of the church.

-The royal family is as follows: Charles, Prince of Wales. Princess Anne. Prince Andrew, Duke of York and Prince Edward.

-The functions of the queen are as follows:

1- She is a permanent symbol of national identity who personifies the state. She has passive roles.

2-She is the head of the executive body of people that put laws into practice.

3-She is the head of the judiciary system.

4-She is the commander in chief of the armed forces.

5-She is the supreme governor of the Church of England.

6-She appoints the prime minister and other ministers on the advice of the parliament members.

7-She gives the royal assent to bills passed by parliament and has the right to veto a bill.

8-She opens and closes parliament.

9- She delivers the speech written by the parliament members.

10-The queen cannot actually declare a war, conclude a treaty nor grant pardons without consulting parliament.

-The British parliament consists of the queen, the House of Lords and the House of Commons.

-The main functions of the parliament are: to pass laws, to provide the means of carrying on the work of government in terms of money by taxation, to scrutinize government policy and administration particularly proposals for expenditure, to debate the great political issues of the day.

The meeting parliament

It has a maximum duration of five years. The life of parliament is divided into two main sessions, each session usually lasts for 1 year beginning and ending most often in October and November. At the start of each parliamentary session, the queen's speech outlines the parliament's proposed legislative program. Each parliamentary session must be terminated by a prorogation (discontinue without dissolving). For example, all business which was not completed within that session is abandoned and the parliament cannot meet again until it is formally opened by the queen.

The House of Lords

It lost the right of veto in 1980. It consists of Lord Spiritual who is mainly concerned with religious matters and Lord Temporal who is concerned with worldly matters. The former is made of the Archbishop of Canterbury and York, 3 bishops of London, Durham and Manchester, 21 senior bishops of the Church of England. The lord temporal consists of hereditary peers and peeresses. Besides, it consists of lord of appeal, lords of law as judges... The House of Lords is presided by the Lord Chancellor.

The House of Commons

It is elected by an adult suffrage. All the seats are divided likewise: 523 for England, 38 for Wales, 72 for Scotland and 17 for northern Ireland. It is mainly concerned with administrative matters, high policy and matters that arouse public interest. There are many opportunities for interrogating, criticizing or attacking ministers. Whenever a member of parliament dies or resigns, a by election takes place. The one who presides is the chief officer (the speaker). He is elected by members of parliament.

The parliamentary electoral system

The residents of a district elect a member to parliament. Elections are held by a secret ballot. British citizens may vote provided that they are 18 years old. Patients who are retained under mental health legislation do not vote. Those sentenced prisoners who were convicted within the previous 5 years for illegal practices were not allowed to vote. Still, members of House of Lords do not vote. Whoever wants to be a member of parliament must be 21 years old.

The Political Party System

The main function of a political party is to sustain the government if it is the government party. If it is the opposition party, it has to provide coherent alternatives to government. Above all, in Britain, the function of the leading political party resides in the fact that it organizes support in the constituencies and the nation as a whole. Furthermore, the function of the leading political part lies again in the fact that it acts as a channel of communication between party members and the leader of the party.

There are three major political parties in Britain:

The conservative party: It is qualified as an autocratic party, that is to say, a union of constituency associations and bodies such as associations of conservative trade unions.

The labour party: it is considered as a democratic party in the sense that it is an alliance of constituency parties: trade unions and socialist societies.

The liberal party: It is different from the conservative and the labour parties respectively. This political party stands between the conservative and the labour parties in matters of organization. Its constitution is considerably more democratic than of the conservative but not as democratic as labour.

The Prime Minister's functions

- The British prime minister is the leader of his party in the House of Commons.
- He is the head of the government.
- He has the right to select his cabinet. He also can hand out the departmental positions.
- He furthermore decides the agenda for cabinet meetings which he also chairs.
- The prime minister can dismiss ministers if this is required.
- He directs and controls policy for the government.
- He is the chief spokesman for the government.
- One of the most important functions of the British prime minister is that he keeps the queen informed of government decisions.
- He further exercises wide powers of patronage and appointments in the civil service, church and judiciary.
- The prime minister further amalgamates or splits government departments.
- He represents the country abroad and he is therefore considered as Britain's de facto representative abroad.
- He decides the date for a general election within the five year term.

-The British prime minister further decides the timetable of government legislation in the House of Commons.

The Political Parties ideologies

- The liberal party ideologies can be summarized as follows:

1-This political party favors social reform and personal liberty.

2-It also aims to reduce the powers of the crown and the church of England.

Sir William Harcourt, a prominent liberal politician in the Victorian era said this about liberalism in 1872:

If there be any party which is more pledged than another to resist a policy of restrictive legislation, having for its object social coercion, that party is the liberal party. But liberty does not consist in making others do what you think right. The difference between a free government and a government which is not free is principally this-that a government which is not free interferes with everything it can, and a free government interferes with nothing except what it must. A despotic government tries to make everybody do what it wishes, a liberal government tries, as far as the safety of society will permit, to allow everybody to do as he wishes. It has been the tradition of the liberal party consistently to maintain the doctrine of individual liberty. It is because they have done so that England is the place where people can do more what they please than in any other country in the world.

-It is important to stress that by the early twentieth century; the liberals stance started to shift towards new liberalism or what would today be called social liberalism. This means that the liberal party strongly believes in personal liberty with a support for government intervention to provide minimum levels of welfare.

The Conservative party ideologies

-This political party strongly favors smaller government and tries all the time to give more power to the people. It further insists that communities should have the opportunity to run failing schools.

-This political party is for family values as well as tax breaks for married couples.

-The conservative party is mainly concerned with taxes and with the fact that British citizens should not pay high taxes and at the same time that the government should not spend a lot of money.

-In addition to the above, the conservative party maintains that private businesses should put more money into the community than the government does. (For instance, more toll roads, less road taxes).

-The conservative party is for privatization. For instance, it is for the breaking down of the national health system and is consequently for the selling of the contracts to private companies.

-The conservative party main belief is that people will help themselves-rather than have the government help them. So the more money you have, the better health care or education you will receive.