**British Parliament*.***

Great Britain is a constitutional monarchy. This means that it has a monarch as its Head of the State. The monarch reigns with the support of Parliament. The powers of the monarch are not defined precisely. Everything today is done in the Queen’s name. It is her government, her armed forces, her law courts and so on. She appoints all the Ministers, including the Prime Minister. Everything is done however on the advice of the elected Government, and the monarch takes no part in the decision-making process.

Once the British Empire included a large number of countries all over the world ruled by Britain. The process of decolonisation began in 1947 with the independence of India, Pakistan and Ceylon. Now there is no Empire and only few small islands belong to Britain. In 1997 the last colony, Hong Kong, was given to China. But the British ruling classes tried not to lose influence over the former colonies of the British Empire. An association of former members of the British Empire and Britain was founded in 1949. It is called the *Commonwealth*. It includes many countries such as Ireland, Burma, the Sudan, Canada, Australia, New Zealand and others. The Queen of Great Britain is also a Head of the *Commonwealth*, and also the Queen of Canada, Australia, New Zealand...

**The British Constitution**. The British Constitution is to a large extent aproduct of many historical events and has thus evolved aver many centuries. Unlike the constitutions of most other countries, it is not set out in any single document. Instead it is made up of statute law, common law and conventions. The constitution can be change by Act of Parliament, or by general agreement to alter a convention.

**The Monarchy in Britain**. When the Queen was born on 21 April 1926, her grandfather, King George V, was on the throne and her uncle was his heir. The death of her grandfather and the abdication of her uncle (King Edward VIII) brought her father to the throne in 1936 as King George **VI.** Elizabeth II came to the throne an 6 February 1952 and was crowned on 2 June 1953. Since then she made many trips to different countries and to the UK also. The Queen is very rich, as are others members of the royal family. In addition, the government pays for her expenses as Head of the State, for a royal yacht, train and aircraft as well as for the upkeep of several palaces. The Queen’s image appears on stamps, notes and coins.

**The Powers of Parliament**. The three elements, which make up Parliament –the Queen, the House of Lords and the elected House of Commons –, are constituted on different principles. They meet together only on occasions of symbolic significance such as the State Opening of Parliament, when the Commons are invited by the Queen to the House of Lords.

Parliament consists of two chambers known as the House of Lords and the House of Commons. Parliament and the monarch have different roles in the government of the country, and they only meet together on symbolic occasions such as coronation of a new monarch or the opening of Parliament. In reality, the House of Commons is the only one of the three which is true power. It is here that new bills are introduced and debated. If the majority of the members aren’t in favour of a bill it goes to the House of Lords to be debated and finally to the monarch to be signed. Only than it becomes law. Although a bill must be supported by all three bodies, the House of Lords only has limited powers, and the monarch hasn’t refused to sign one.

**The Functions of Parliament**. The main functions of Parliament are: to pass laws; to provide, by voting taxation, the means of carrying on the work of government; to scrutinise government policy and administration; to debate the major issues of the day. In carrying out these functions Parliament helps to bring the relevant facts and issues before the electorate. By custom, Parliament is also informed before all-important international treaties and agreements are ratified.

A Parliament has a maximum duration of five years, but in practice general elections are usually held before the end of this term. Parliament is dissolved and rights for a general election are ordered bythe Queen on the advice of the Prime Minister. The life of a Parliament is divided into sessions. Each usually lasts for one year – normally beginning and ending in October or November. The adverse number of "sitting" days in a session is about 168 in the House of Commons and about 150 in the House of Lords. At the start of each session the Queen's speech to Parliament outlines the Government’s policies and proposed legislative programme.

**The House of Commons**. The House of Commons is elected and consists of 651 Members of Parliament (MPs). At present there are 60 women, three Asian and three black Mps. Of the 651 seats, 524 are for England, 38 for Wales, 72 for Scotland, and 17 for Northern Ireland. Members are paid an annual salary of ‡30,854. The chief officer of the House of Commons is the Speaker, elected by the MPs to preside over the House. The House of Commons plays the major role in law making.

MPs sit on two sides of the hall, one side for the governing party and the other for the opposition. Parliament has intervals during its work. MPs are paid for their parliamentary work and have to attend the sittings. MPs have to catch the Speaker's eye when they want to speak, then they rise from where they have been sitting to address the House and must do so without either reading a prepared speech or consulting notes.

**The House of Lords**. The House of Lords consists of the Lords Spiritual and the Lords Temporal. The Lords Spiritual are the Archbishops of Canterbury and York, and the 24 next most senior bishops of the Church of England. The Lords Temporal consist of: all hereditary peers of England, Scotland, Great Britain and the United Kingdom; all other life peers. Peerages, both hereditary and life, are created by the Sovereign on the advice of the Prime Minister. They are usually granted in recognition of service in politics or other walks of life. In 1992 there were 1,211 members of the House of Lords, including the twoarchbishops and 24 bishops. The Lords Temporal consisted of 758 hereditary peers and 408 life peers. The House is presided over by the Lord Chancellor, who takes his place on the woolsack as the Speaker of the House.

The division of Parliament into two Houses goes back over some 700 years when feudal assembly ruled the country. In modern times, real political power rests in the elected House although members of the House of Lords still occupy important cabinet posts.

**The Political Party System**. The present political system depends upon the existence of organised political parties, each of which presents its policies to the electorate for approval. The parties are not registered or formally recognised in law, but in practice most candidates in elections, and almost all winning candidates, belong to one of' the main parties.

For the last 150years there were only 2 parties: the Conservative Party and the Labour Party. A new party – the Liberal Democrats – was formed in 1988. Social Democratic Party is also the new one founded in 1981. Other parties include two nationalist parties, Plaid Cymru (founded in Wales in 1925) and the Scottish National Party (founded in 1934).

The effectiveness of the party system in Parliament rests largely on the relationship between the Government and the Opposition parties. Depending on the relative strengths of the parties in the House of Commons, the Opposition may seek to overthrow the Government by defeating it in a vote on a "matter of confidence". In general, however, its aims are to contribute to the formation of policy and legislation by constructive criticism; to oppose government proposal - it considers objectionable; to seek amendments to government bills; and to put forward its own policies in order to improve its chances of winning the next general election.

Because of the electoral method in use, only two major parties obtain seats in the House of Commons. People belonging to smaller political parties join one of the larger parties and work from within to make their influence felt. The exception to this are members of the Scottish National and Welsh Nationalist Parties, who, because their influence votes are concentrated in specific geographical areas, can manage to win seats although their total support is relatively small.

**Her Majesty's Government: Prime Minister, the Cabinet**. Her Majesty's Government is the body of ministers responsible for the administration of national affairs. The Prime Minister is appointed by the Queen, and all other ministers are appointed by the Queen on the recommendation of the Prime Minister. Most ministers are members of the Commons, although the Government is also fully represented by ministers in the Lords. The composition of governments can vary both in the number of ministers and in the titles of some offices. New ministerial offices may be created, others may be abolished and functions may be transferred from one minister to another.

The Prime Minister is also, by tradition, First Lord of the Treasury and Minister for the Civil Service. The Prime Minister’s unique position of authority derives from majority support in the House of Commons and from the power to appoint and dismiss ministers. By modern convention, the Prime Minister always sits in the House of Commons. The Prime Minister presides over the Cabinet, is responsible for the allocation of functions among ministers and informs the Queen at regular meetings of the general business of the Government. The Prime Minister's Office is situated at 11 Downing Street.

The Cabinet is composed of about 20 ministers chosen by the Prime Minister. The functions of the Cabinet are initiating and deciding on policy, the supreme control of government and the co-ordination of government departments. The exercise of these functions is vitally affected by the fact that the Cabinet is a group of party representatives, depending upon majority support in the House of Commons. The Cabinet meets in private and its proceedings are confidential. Its members are bound by their oath as Privy Counsellors not to disclose information about its proceedings, although after 30 years Cabinet papers may be made available for inspection.

So Great Britain is the constitutional monarchy. Monarch is the Head of the State. But Queen or King rules with the support of the parliament. And practically monarch have no real political power. The main political decisions are made by the Parliament and Cabinet. And the House of Commons are more powerful.