**Government and Politics**

The organs of government in the United Kingdom are: l)the legislature, which consists of the Queen in Parliament, and is the supreme authority of the realm; 2) the executive which consists of a) the Cabinet and other ministers of the Crown; b) government departments, c] local authorities and d) statutory boards; 3) the judiciary which determine common law and interprets statutes.

**Parliament**

1. General:

"The King in Parliament" is the supreme legislative authority in the UK, the King and the two Houses of Parliament (the House of Commons and the House of Lords).

The sovereignty of parliament: during its life a Parliament may make or unmake any law; its supremacy is absolute. There is no distinction between normal legislation and constitutional law.

The Life of Parliament: five years maximum. It begins after a general election and ends with a dissolution (proclaimed by the sovereign, on the Prime Minister's advice). On the average the Parliament has 160 sitting days each year beginning with the Opening of Parliament (October - November).

2. House of Commons: Members of Parliament are elected by universal adult suffrage. 650 members ( M.P.s ) are elected either at a general election (following a dissolution) or at a by-election if a seat becomes vacant.

M.P.s receive a salary and have a number of allowances.

Personalities:

The speaker: chosen from the members (after consultation between the two main parties); but, once elected, is no longer considered a party man; his role: chairs the debates, authority and prestige ( Symbol of the House).

The Leader of the House: formely the Prime Minister himself now a prominent member of the government.

The Leader of the Opposition receives a salary like a minister.

The Whips are members responsible to theii leaders for party discipline on important divisions.

Functions of the House: 1. Legislation; 2. Finance; 3. Criticism and contra, of the government in office (which is practically exercised during the Question Time when M.P.s may ask questions on any aspects of the government's activities).

A Typical Day's Work of the House of Commons:

Morning - committees, private discussions, departmental work.

Afternoon: 2.30- prayers and minor preliminaries. 2.35-3.30 – Question Time Parliamentary questions (PQs) are sent through the Speaker to the minister in writing. Two or three days later the minister or his parliamentary secretary will come to the House and reply. 3.30 – Miscellaneous items (first readings etc.). 4.00-10.00 – Main business of the day. 10.00 - Adjournment motion, speech of the adjournment

From a Bill to an Act.

First reading - a formality, the printed text is then published. Second reading - principles are discussed in a wide debate followed by a vote.

Committee Stage - examination clause by clause. Report stage -in the House itself.

Third reading - discussion on the text as it has emerged from the earlier stages. It is the final stage in the House. The Bill is sent to the Lords for similar discussions. Royal Assent: the King (or Queen) gives his assent (no veto used since 1707) and the Bill reaches the statute book, it is then called the Act of Parliament

3. House of Lords:

-Parliament Act of 1911: the Lords can delay a bill for two years. They have no authority on "money bills".

-Parliament Act 1949: the Lords can delay a bill for one year only.

-Life Peerage Act 1958: created a new category, the Life Peers and admitted women.

The presiding officer of the House of Lords is the Lord Chancellor who is a member of the Cabinet. The Lord Chancellor's seat in the House of Lords is the so-called Woolsack.

Composition of the House:

-800 hereditary peers (approx.);Lords Temporal: dukes, marquesses, earls, viscounts, barons.

-26 Lords Spiritual: the archbishops of Canterbury and York, 24 bishops of the Church of England.

340 Life Peers (approx.).

Attendance and Representation of Parties:

1) -300 never attend

-300 come very rarely ("backwoodsmen")

-230 come occasionally

-250 come regularly

2) 30 Labour

30 Liberal or non-party

The rest: Conservative (i.e. there is a permanent Conservative majority in the House of Lords)

Functions of the House: Discussion of bills coming from the Commons, veto is hardly ever used; introduction of bills; supreme court of appeal.