

3. Point of view

Point of view refers to the way a story is told. The author may choose a first-person narrator, using the pronoun 'I'. This can have an intimate, confessional feel. Or a third-person narrator using the pronouns 'he', 'she' or 'they'. A story told in the third person gives a special insight into the consciousness of one or more characters.

- Give examples of the point of view used by Benjamin Zephaniah in this poem.
- Comment on the effect of using the technique chosen.

4. Tone

- How would you describe the tone or mood of the poem?

5. Style

- How would you describe the style of writing used by the author? Choose between the adjectives below and discuss your choices with a partner. Support your choices with examples from the text.

objective subjective formal informal involving aggressive
manipulative frightening funny contrasting ironic provocative
informative entertaining political humorous positive negative
partial impartial colourful emotional persuasive detached
sympathetic

6. Find out what happened to the Alien Deporters in the case of Joy Gardner.

See e.g. http://news.bbc.co.uk/2/hi/uk_news/279922.stm or google 'Joy Gardner' and 'family'.

7. What do you think of the SUS law – the informal name for the stop-and-search law that permits a police officer to act on suspicion, or 'sus' alone?

Chapter 5 Enchantment and disenchantment – political issues

Introduction

Attitudes to politics

The Monarchy

Fiction: Number Ten

by Sue Townsend

Introduction

Attitudes to politics

Government and politics in Britain take place in the context of mainly traditional institutions, laws and conventions. This ensures peaceful and reasonably tolerant behaviour between political parties. As Peter Williams points out in his introductory essay, *'politics in Britain makes headline news repeatedly, but it is personality and personality clashes which dominate, rather than ideological differences.'*

In this introduction, the most important aspects of government and institutions in Britain will be outlined. After the outline, the chapter contains the article "Frustration and disenchantment" about some first-time voters and their attitude to politics, and what made them frustrated in the 2005 election. It also deals with the problem of falling turnouts in elections.

The terrorist attacks in the UK – the London Underground bombings in July 2005 and the car bombings in the City of London and Glasgow in June 2007 – have naturally led to many deliberations and changes in British society. The article "Put out more flags, says Brown, in display of solidarity against terror" is an attempt by Gordon Brown, the present Labour Prime Minister (2008), to use the British flag, the Union Jack, as a unifying symbol of national solidarity against terrorism. The Prime Minister aims at creating a new sense of Britishness, together with Parliament and the Monarchy as common symbols.

The Monarchy

The present Queen Elizabeth II has reigned since her father's death in 1952. The heir to the throne is her eldest son, the Prince of Wales. He has let his opinions be publicly known on a range of environmental and other matters, but when/if he becomes king, he will be required to act and speak only in a ceremonial manner. Peter Williams sums up the situation in this way: *"The population is fairly evenly divided at present between those in favour of retaining the Monarchy, and those who want to see a republic and the abolition of the Monarchy. The North/South divide exists here too, with the Queen and her family less popular the further one moves north from London."*

The role of the Monarchy and the different types of royal duties, as well as at-

Queen Elizabeth and Prince William



titudes to the Royals, are also the subject of this chapter. The article "Royal Visit: Queen Elizabeth in America" gives an impression of the Queen's roles both in public and in private. The leading article from the Sunday Express "Queen leads our nation's defiance in face of terror" shows clearly the role of the Monarchy and an attitude to the Royals. This article is about the London Underground bombings that took place on Thursday, July 7, 2005.

Politicians in Britain do not have a very good reputation. To describe someone who is not a professional politician as a 'politician' is to criticize him or her and suggests a lack of trustworthiness. Politicians are regarded with a high degree of suspicion as it appears from the article "Frustration and disenchantment". The political climate is seen as a tough, dishonest, vicious and ruthless game behind the scenes with no mercy shown for missteps. This is reflected in the brief extract from the wickedly entertaining novel *Number Ten* by Sue Townsend. Like all political satire, this can only be popular because people believe that it is, at least partly, a true reflection of reality. It therefore illustrates the British attitude to politicians and politics.

Check your sense of humour

Five surgeons are discussing the types of people they like to operate on.

The first surgeon says:

"I like to see accountants on my operating table, because when you open them up, everything inside is numbered."

The second surgeon responds:

"Yeah, but you should try electricians! Everything inside them is colour coded."

The third surgeon says:

"No, I really think librarians are the best; everything inside them is in alphabetical order."

The fourth surgeon chimes in:

"You know, I like construction workers ... those guys always understand when you have a few parts left over."

But the fifth surgeon shut them all up when he observed:

"You're all wrong. Politicians are the easiest to operate on. There's no guts, no heart, no balls, no brains and no spine, and the head and the ass are interchangeable."

Government and institutions

The Constitution

Most countries have a written constitution that defines the rights and obligations of the people. It may be regarded as a contract between the citizens and the government. Great Britain has no such document. Instead its constitution is based on the following sources:

- Statute law: Acts of Parliament
- Common law: decisions passed by the judges
- EU law
- Customs of Parliament.

What is special about the British Constitution is that it is unwritten and flexible.

Constitutional Monarchy

The British Queen reigns, but she does not rule. This means that governmental matters are carried out by the politicians and the officials of the country in the name of the Monarch. Although the Monarch has no formal power, her informal power should not be undervalued.

According to the constitution she is head of the executive, the judiciary and the legislature. She is also head of the Church of England and the commander-in-chief of the armed forces.

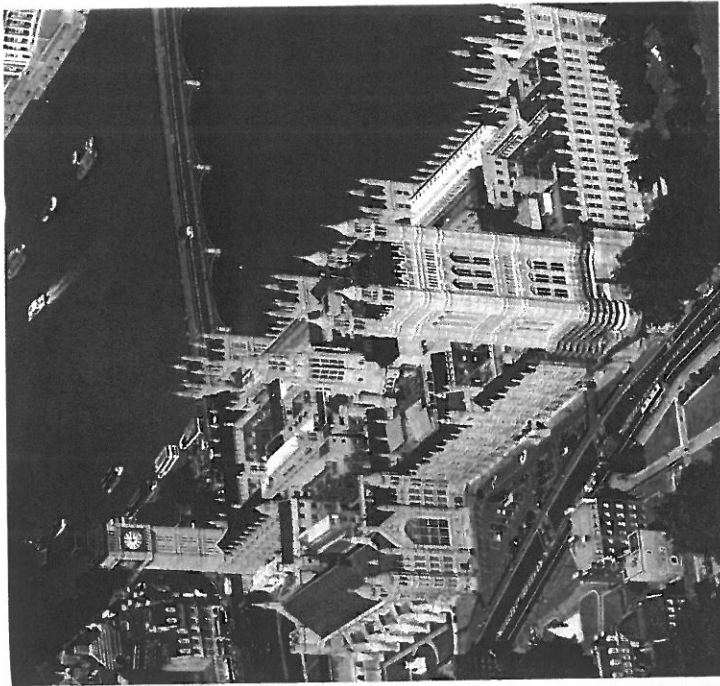
Thus her formal roles are:

- to sign all laws
- to appoint all judges and other important people, including the Prime Minister and his ministers
- to dissolve and summon Parliament
- to give the Queen's Speech – on behalf of the Prime Minister – in the House of Lords when the new parliamentary session begins.

Parliament

The British Parliament is a bi-cameral (two-house) system consisting of the House of Commons (the lower house) and the House of Lords (the upper house). The Parliament resides in Whitehall and is the highest legislative authority in the UK.

Parliament



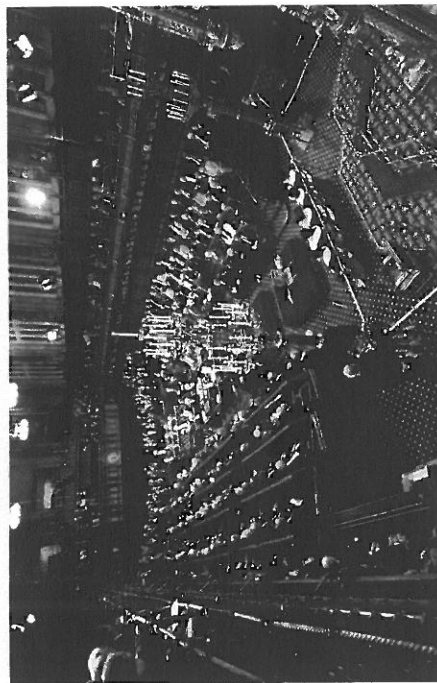
The House of Commons is the more important of the two houses as its members are democratically elected. It has 646 members elected in the 646 constituencies throughout the UK.

The House of Commons



Its main functions are:

- to pass legislation
- to scrutinize government
- to control the state finances.



The House of Lords

The House of Lords is the unelected part of Parliament. It used to represent the nobility, but it has recently experienced big changes. Today, it has 725 members called peers.

The members are:

- 581 life peers – appointed for life by the Prime Minister (officially the Queen)
- 92 hereditary peers who represent the nobility
- 26 bishops and archbishops
- 26 law lords, as the House of Lords also functions as the highest court of appeal.

Its main functions are:

- to pass legislation (this House can only delay, but not veto, a bill)
- to scrutinize the bills from the House of Commons (bills may also start in the House of Lords)
- to debate current issues.

The electoral system

The members of the House of Commons sit for a period of five years. At least every five years there is a general election. For electoral purposes the country is divided into 646 constituencies, each representing the same number of people. Each con-

stituency returns a member to a seat in the House of Commons in a first-past-the-post system or a winner-take-all system. This means that all votes cast on the loser are lost. In theory a candidate may get 49% of the votes, but lose the election.

As Members of Parliament (MPs) are dependent on their local constituency for their re-election, it means that it is of vital importance for them to keep in close contact with their constituency.

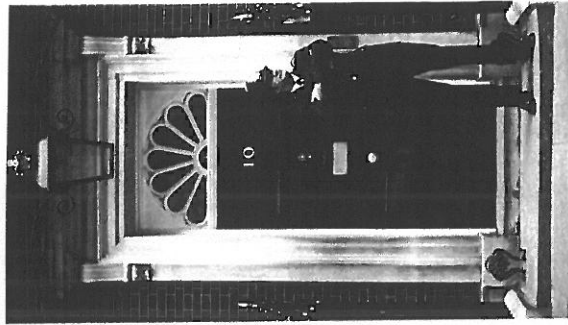
Government and Cabinet

After each general election the leader of the winning party is asked to form the government. In Britain the government may consist of more than a hundred ministers and parliamentary private secretaries. Typically, there will be 20-22 ministries. This means that each ministry will have a senior minister and a number of junior ministers. In addition, all ministers have parliamentary private secretaries who are unpaid ministers in training. Ministers may come from either the House of Commons or the House of Lords.

The head of the government is the Prime Minister (PM). The Prime Minister is appointed by the Monarch and resides in 10 Downing Street. The Prime Minister's main functions are:

- to choose and dismiss ministers
- to be the leader of the party in power
- to control policy-making
- to head the civil service.

The Prime Minister also presides over **the Cabinet** which usually comprises about 20 senior ministers. The Cabinet meets regularly and outlines the major political visions.



Political parties

Political party membership in Britain has been declining rapidly in the last few years. No one knows if this is a temporary or a long-term change. This, combined with a falling turnout in elections, especially among 18-25 year olds, has become a matter of general concern.

Due to the electoral system, Britain is primarily a two-party system. The two major political parties are the Conservative Party, also referred to as the Tory Party, and the Labour Party.

The Labour Party has historically been a left-of-centre party emphasising social justice, equal opportunities, economic planning and the state ownership of industries and services. Most of its voters are concentrated in Scotland, South Wales, the Midlands and Northern English industrial cities.

The Conservative Party is a right-of-centre party emphasising personal, social and economic freedom and individual ownership of property. It recruits the majority of its voters from the South of England.

Apart from the two major parties we find the Liberal Democratic Party, which fragmented from the Labour Party in 1988 and joined forces with the old Liberal Party. This party focuses on local government, constitutional reform and civil liberties.

There are other political parties elected by the public, for instance nationalist organisations like Plaid Cymru (Wales) and the Scottish National Party, and Northern Ireland's various political parties.

Comprehension and opinions

Constitution

- Give a brief presentation of the history of the Danish Constitution.
- Discuss the pros and cons of having a written as opposed to an unwritten constitution.

Constitutional monarchy

- Discuss the pros and cons of having a monarchy in contrast to being a republic.

Parliament

- Compare the British and the Danish parliaments and discuss the relevance of a bi-cameral system.
- Discuss whether the House of Lords is only a relic of the past or whether it serves a practical function today.

The electoral system

- Discuss the pros and cons of the British electoral system compared with the system of proportional representation (which means that a party will get the number of seats in parliament according to the percentage of votes it has received in the election).

Government and Cabinet

- Find out who is the Prime Minister in Britain and in Denmark respectively and which political parties they belong to.

Political parties

- Comment on the strengths and weaknesses of a two-party system and compare these with the strengths and weaknesses of a multi-party system like the Danish.
- Explain why small nationalist parties have a chance in the British electoral system.

Frustration and disenchantment

TALK LESS DO MORE?



On the BBC election bus in Northampton, Wednesday, 4 May, 2005: "It's not been about the policies and what the parties stand for. It's just a bit of a slugging-off match really, isn't it? I do find it hard to trust the parties."

These are not the words of a weary old cynic. They come from the mouth of Gemma Harris, aged 18.

Gemma is eligible to vote for the first time this week, and the experience of her first election campaign has left her feeling a little disenchanted. Gemma admits she is not big on politics. She has tried to follow the issues but she says it's been too much about personalities and negative campaigning.

"I want to vote and I will vote, but I don't have a clue who for," she says.

Gemma is an A-level student at Northampton School for Boys (they take girls in the sixth form). She's one of a group of first-time voters who've agreed to tell me what they think.

That they are prepared to speak out illustrates that they are not apathetic teenagers. They are just frustrated.

"Politicians have just got to start talking more about issues," says Ben

disenchantment
skuffelse
slag off rakke ned på
'weary træt
'cynic kynisk person
be 'eligible have valgret

'disenchanted skuffet
big on begejstret for
not have a clue ikke ane

'A-level 'student [svarende til gymnasieelev]
sixth form [svarende til sidste gymnasieår]

apathetic sløv, ligeglad