

UNITED KINGDOM

Date of Elections: June 18, 1970

Characteristics of Parliament

The Parliament of the United Kingdom is composed of two Houses:

— The House of Commons, which consists of 630 members elected for 5 years.

— The House of Lords, which has approximately 850 hereditary peers; 16 peers elected for each legislature by the hereditary peers of Scotland; the survivors of the 28 life peers elected by the hereditary peers of Ireland prior to 1920; 155 peers appointed by the Crown; 9 Lords of Ordinary Appeal, high magistrates appointed for life; and 26 Lords Spiritual (the 2 Archbishops of Canterbury and York, the 3 Bishops of London, Winchester and Durham and the 21 Bishops of longest standing). The functions of President of this upper House are exercised by the Lord Chancellor who is appointed by the Prime Minister and is not necessarily a peer.

British citizens were called to the polls on June 18, 1970, to elect the 630 members of the House of Commons, prematurely dissolved on May 29, 1970.

Electoral System

All British subjects or citizens of the Irish Republic, of either sex, are entitled to vote, provided they have reached the age of 18 by the day on which the elections are held, and are registered on the electoral list (revised annually) of the constituency in which they are resident. A person whose 18th birthday will fall in the 12 months following the publication date of the electoral lists may be registered on them, but may not vote before reaching the required age.

However, members of the House of Lords, the mentally deficient, criminals sentenced to more than 12 months' imprisonment, or any persons who, during the 5 years prior to the election, have been found guilty of electoral corruption or fraud may not exercise their right to vote.

The possibility of voting by proxy or by post is granted to members of the armed forces, to servants of the Crown and their dependents stationed abroad, and to any person who is absent on a journey at the time of the election or has a valid reason for being unable to go to the poll .

Voting is not compulsory.

Any British citizen who has reached the age of 21 is eligible for the House of Commons, with the exception of members of the clergy, undischarged bankrupts and certain persons holding an office of profit under the Crown.

Candidatures must be presented by 2 members of the electorate and supported by 8 others.

The United Kingdom is divided into 630 constituencies, each of which elects one member of Parliament by simple plurality system.

General Political Considerations and Conduct of the Elections

On May 18, 1970, Mr. Harold Wilson requested an audience with the Queen to ask her to proclaim the premature dissolution of Parliament on May 29, the date of the general election being set for June 18.

The Prime Minister had had to face many difficulties during the previous year. His social policy and the measures he proposed for settling labour disputes had caused such opposition both in trade union circles and within his own party that he had been forced to abandon them. The Labour Party's loss of popularity had resulted in several Conservative victories in by-elections, the Tories thus gradually reducing Mr. Wilson's majority in the Commons.

But the long-term effects of the 1967 devaluation were beginning to show positive results. The economic recovery and the spectacular improvement in the balance of payments had brought about a feeling of optimism in the country. Mr. Wilson thus thought the time right to go to the country, campaigning under the slogan: "Now Britain's strong, let's make it great to live in".

The Conservatives were not discouraged by the opinion polls which predicted a comfortable Labour victory, and, under their leader, Mr. Edward Heath, campaigned for a fresh approach, for "a better tomorrow".

They promised to stabilize prices, to reduce taxes, to see that regional development was better balanced and to make a particular effort to improve social conditions and housing. They also propagated the idea that the Socialists would further devalue the pound if returned to power.

The Liberals joined the contest, and, under the slogan "What a life!" pointed to the failure of Conservative and Socialist Governments. Wishing to rally the discontented, they denounced the increase in prices and the decline in the purchasing power of the pound. It should also be noted that, in their manifesto, they advocated the introduction of proportional representation.

The problem of the immigration of coloured Commonwealth citizens, vehemently raised by the Conservative candidate, Mr. Enoch Powell, embarrassed top officials of the two leading parties who succeeded, nevertheless, in preventing this from becoming the central issue of the electoral campaign.

Contrary to all forecasts, the election results gave victory to the Conservative Party which won a large majority in the Parliament, as can be seen from the statistics given below.

Dr. Horace King, Speaker of the outgoing House, stood for the constituency of Itchen (Southampton) in that capacity and not as a Socialist candidate. The Conservative and Liberal parties decided not to oppose him, his only rivals being a National Democratic Party candidate and an Independent. He conducted a non-political campaign and, after his re-election, was once again asked to guide the debates of the Commons.

Statistics

1. Results of the Elections (provisional figures) and Distribution of Seats in the House of Commons

Number of registered voters.	39,384,364
Voters.	28,344,807 (73.7 %)
Blank or void ballot papers.	86,475
Valid votes.	28,258,332

Political Group	Number of Candidates	Votes obtained	%	Number of Seats in the House of Commons
Conservative Party	628	13,106,965	46.4	330 (+77)
Labour Party.	624	12,141,676	43.0	287 (—76)
Liberal Party.	332	2,109,218	7.4	6 (-6)
Scottish Nationalist Party.	65	900,473	3.2	1 (+1)
Republican Labour Party .				1 (=)
Protestant Unionist Party .				1 (+1)
Independent Unity Party .	94			1 (+1)
Unity Party.				1 (+1)
Independent Labour Party				1 (+1)
Welsh Nationalist Party .	36			- (-)
Communist Party	58			- (=)
Speaker.	1			1 (=)
	1,838			630

2. *Distribution of Members of the House of Commons
according to Professional Category*

	Conservative Party	Labour Party	Liberal Party and Others	Total
Company directors	107	3	—	110
Barristers	56	34	2	92
Teachers and lecturers	7	56	2	65
Journalists	35	25	—	60
Farmers and landowners	39	3	—	42
Managers, executives and administrators	17	23	1	41
Trade union officials	—	34	—	34
Solicitors	11	12	—	23
Underwriters and brokers	22	1	—	23
Engineers	3	19	—	22
Mineworkers	—	20	1	21
Clerical and technical workers	4	11	—	15
Other manual workers	1	12	—	13
Party officials	7	2	1	10
Doctors and surgeons	4	6	—	10
Publishers	6	2	—	8
Accountants	5	2	—	7
Civil Servants	2	3	—	5
Railway workers	—	5	—	5
Public relations officers	2	2	—	4
Others	10	10	—	20
				630

3. *Distribution of Members of the House of Commons
according to Sex*

Men	605
Women	25
	630