

# ARMY TALKS



## *The British Political System*



**Restricted**

ARMY TALKS is a classified official publication of the United States Army in the European Theater of Operations. The material contained herein may not be quoted or republished, in whole or in part, nor may it be communicated, directly or indirectly, to persons not authorized to receive it, except by authority of the Commanding General, ETOUSA.

EUROPEAN THEATER OF OPERATIONS, UNITED STATES ARMY



## TABLE OF CONTENTS

Two Types of Houses .. .. .	4
The British Political System .. .. .	5
Government of Great Britain (chart) .. .. .	11
Preparation .. .. .	17
Questions for the Discussion .. .. .	18

---

**ARMY TALKS** :—The **PURPOSE** of **ARMY TALKS** is to help American officers and enlisted personnel become better-informed men and women and therefore better soldiers.

**ARMY TALKS** are designed to stimulate discussion and thought, and, by their very nature, thus may often be controversial in content. They are not to promote or to propagandize any particular causes, beliefs or theories. Rather, they draw upon all suitable sources for fact and comment, in the American tradition, with each individual retaining his American right and heritage so far as his own opinion is concerned.

**THEREFORE**, the statements and opinions expressed herein are not necessarily verified by, nor do they necessarily reflect the opinions of, the United States Army.

**THE SOURCE OF MATERIAL** must therefore be made clear at each discussion. All written material appearing in this publication has been written and edited by uniformed members of the Army and/or Navy, except where it is stated that a civilian or other outside source is being quoted.

## ***Foreword***

**T**HE forms of government which the citizens of a free nation have devised for themselves are a key to the understanding of that nation. Like everything else which has been built out of generations of hopes and trials and failures, each political institution has its own personality.

**N**OBODY could understand the American Government, or the American people, merely by reading the Constitution of the United States and the decisions of the Supreme Court. He would also have to know what election day feels like, what a County Courthouse looks like, what a Democratic or Republican National Convention looks like if you attend it, or sounds like if you hear it on the air.

**S**IMILARLY, we could study the British legal system till Doomsday and not know much about British politics. In one way their system sounds very like ours, in that it's a democracy with a House of Commons elected by all the people. In another way their system sounds very unlike ours, in that it's a monarchy with a House of Lords to which a man must either be born or appointed. But no such comparisons, and no such text books' statements of fact, can make the politics of England come alive in the imagination. That can only be done by a combination of facts and interpretation, facts and historical explanation of how things got that way.

It is such a combination which the author presents in this pamphlet.

**HERBERT AGAR.**

## TWO TYPES OF HOUSES

**I**F you know the country side near any of the great eastern Cities of the United States you must be familiar with two kinds of house. There is the new, modern house, built at one time, according to the plans of an architect, perhaps furnished according to the plans of an interior decorator. Of course, once a house begins to be lived in, no architect, no decorator can possibly foresee the alterations the dwellers in the house will make. Some of the alterations will continue long after the inhabitants have forgotten the reason for the change. But for all the changes made deliberately or accidentally, the original plan will remain visible; the original design will be followed fairly closely. Such a house is the American constitution and its furniture of political habits and adjustments.

But scattered among these new houses are old houses, houses that were built by farmers two or three hundred years ago. Successive generations have added and destroyed; one has put on an ell; another has removed a barn; there are new windows on that side and a garage where the ice-house used to be.

There is still the old well and the old oaken bucket, but there is no water in the well and the bucket would leak badly if it were ever used. Not only the original builder, but nearly every one of the successive owners of the house would be puzzled to find his way about it.

It is quite easy to live in the house as long as you ask no question about why this or that exists. If you must ask those questions, the answer will take you a long way back. Such a house is the English constitution and its furniture of political habits and adjustments.

It does not follow that the modern systematic house is easier to live in than the old, remodelled farm house. Because it is old, because it is remodelled, because no one knows or cares what was the original plan, the dwellers in the old house may be less conservative in their attitude to their house than are the dwellers in the newer house to theirs. As they do not know and do not much care who made the original plans, they have no shame in altering them. Because adjustments have been made, generation after generation, because the house has never looked modern, symmetrical, planned, each generation can, if it chooses, take over very modern improvements.

It is not necessarily the newer house that has got away from the septic tank and private water supply to joining-up with a really modern drainage system and with a really modern water-supply.

There is one handicap involved in living in a house that has been tinkered with for many centuries. That house will be full of things that are now never used at all, or are used for purposes for which they are not designed, or serve both an old and a new purpose. And it will be hard for the inhabitants to explain to themselves why the andirons which used to stand by the obsolete fire-place now serve to prop open the garage door. And they will find it harder to explain these things to dwellers in a planned house.

The English constitution cannot be explained simply, coherently; it is a way of political life that can only be illustrated. There is no blue-print; there is, at best, a more or less adequate working model.



# ARMY TALKS

## EUROPEAN THEATER OF OPERATIONS

### THE BRITISH POLITICAL SYSTEM

**I**N the Library of Congress in Washington, there is (in peacetime) a shrine containing two politically sacred texts, the Declaration of Independence and the Constitution of the United States. From 1940 until Pearl Harbor, the Library also exhibited one of the original manuscript versions of Magna Carta.

In a true sense, Magna Carta is an ancestor both of the Declaration of Independence and of the Constitution. It has its place in American history. It also has its place in English history, but it has no such easily identifiable descendants as it has in America.

#### Magna Carta is Basic Law

Magna Carta is the first Statute of the Realm: its principles (or what later generations have assumed to be its principles) are embodied in political documents like the Bill of Rights of 1689 and embedded in innumerable statutes and judicial decisions, but, separately, or together, they do not make up what is called the "British Constitution," for that is a mass of practice, customs, political good manners.

Some of this practice can be stated clearly, briefly and not misleadingly. Some of this practice, customs and good manners

can only be stated briefly at the cost of being stated too simply, too dogmatically. And in the British, as in every other political system, personalities, accidents, internal and external pressures, are continually at work to make any current description in some degree out of date as soon as it is written.

#### Both Systems Stress

##### Government by Law

Both the British and American constitutional systems attach great importance to *law*. Both assume that law is something different from the "good pleasure" of an absolute monarch, or the "national interest" of a totalitarian state. Both assume that law binds the rulers as well as the ruled.

But while American law may have several sources, the States, the Union, and, more important, while it may be held by the Courts that what the legislatures of the States or the Union declare to be law is not law, English Law has only one source; it is what

the Courts apply and the Courts will apply as law anything that Parliament says is law.

The Royal Veto: What is this law-making body with

*Denis W. Brogan, the author of this issue of ARMY TALKS, is an Englishman, and a professor of political history at Cambridge University. In addition, he is a director of the British Broadcasting Corporation, a newspaper writer, and the author of books on British and American history.*

its absolute powers? Formally, it is "the King in Parliament." Law is what both Houses of Parliament pass in the form of a bill and present to the King for his signature.

So far the system looks like the American system. But the royal veto, never formally abolished, has not been exercised for two hundred years.

The British voter knows that when a bill has passed both houses it will receive the royal assent—and the fact that the assent is given in obsolete French, not in English, merely illustrates how far removed from practical politics the possibility of a royal veto is. You can't say no to the people in a language that they do not understand.

The House of Lords: If the King plays no direct part in the law-making process, what about Parliament? In common speech Parliament is the House of Commons, but in form it is both houses. And the House whose position is hardest to understand is the "Upper House," the House of Lords.

### House of Lords Retains

#### Many Obsolete Traditions

The real position of the House of Lords is very different from the formal position. But the title of "Upper House" is misleading, not merely because many powers of the Lords are obsolete as many powers of the King are obsolete, but because, rare event in English political practice, the powers of the House of Lords are defined by written law, by the Parliament Act of 1911.

By that Act the powers of the Lords over "money bills" were destroyed. Any bill sent to the Lords *which the*

*Speaker of the House of Commons* certified is a money bill, becomes law, unamended, whatever the House of Lords does.

The contrast with American law and practice is interesting. Although "all bills for raising revenue shall originate in the House of Representatives," once they get to the Senate they can be amended in any way the Senate likes, and in subsequent battles with the House the Senate wins as often as not.

In the English system the raising of money is entirely in the hands of the most democratic part of the governmental machine. The equivalents of the President and the Senate are excluded altogether.

### Lords May Exercise Delay Veto

Ordinary legislation is not dealt with so simply. Here the House of Lords has real though limited powers. It can reject any bill not certified as a money bill. But when it has done that three times running in the same Parliament, the bill becomes law without the assent of the Lords.

In effect, the Lords have a power of delaying legislation for a little over two years if Parliament has not been dissolved in the meantime. It is not a negligible power, but it leaves the House of Lords profoundly weaker than is the United States Senate.

The body which exercises these limited powers is undemocratic in theory and practice, which is why, in modern England, its powers are so limited. In this democratic age, giving political power, even limited political power, to some seven hundred men because they or their ancestors for various reasons were "ennobled" seems extraordinary. It is not quite as extraordinary as it seems, as a closer inspection will reveal.





**1215** **The Great Charter  
of the Liberties of England**

In the first place, we have granted to God . . . . .  
that the English Church shall be free and have her  
rights and liberties inviolate.

No freeman shall be taken or imprisoned, nor  
shall he be deprived of his free tenement, privileges,  
or franchises . . . . . except by lawful judgment of  
his peers and (or) the law of the land.

To none will we sell, to none will we deny or  
delay right or justice.

The city of London shall have all its ancient liberties.  
There shall be one standard of weights and  
measures throughout the Kingdom.



All merchants shall have  
liberty safely to enter,  
reside, travel  
in, and leave  
the country.

### Soldiers, Business Men Represented

The majority of the members of the House of Lords does not consist of descendants of Norman barons or of courtiers of Queen Elizabeth or of mistresses of Charles II, although a few specimens of each of these classes still exist. The majority of peers are the descendants of successful lawyers, soldiers, politicians and business men, above all of successful business men.

For over a century past, every really rich man in England whose conduct was not publicly reproachable could become a peer if he took the trouble to try. The House of Lords was much less exclusive socially than some Boston or Philadelphia clubs, than some college fraternities. It was recruited from successful men.

Today, as far as the House of Lords is important and is powerful, it is because it contains a large number of men who are powerful and important in their own right. Nobody is important or powerful just because he is in the House of Lords and, indeed, an able young man with political ambitions is handicapped by being a peer, as all real political careers are made in the House of Commons.

### Successful Men Become Peers

The typical peers today are people like the great newspaper owners (all of the great London dailies are represented in the House of Lords by their owners with two exceptions). The House of Lords includes great business men like Lord Keynes, great doctors like Lord Moran.

It includes, also, a certain number of retired public servants whose advice is still valuable, men like Lord Lugard and Lord Vansittart. It includes a number of very eminent lawyers, for the equivalent of the Supreme Court of the United States (a very rough equivalent) is the House of Lords as a judicial body, the small group of "Law Lords" under the Lord Chancellor who act as the Supreme Court of Appeal for Britain and, in another building under the name of the "Judicial Committee of the Privy Council," as the

Supreme Court of the Empire for such parts of the Empire, mainly Canada and India, as want an outside, objective tribunal to settle burning questions of private and occasionally of constitutional law.

The House of Lords as a political, not as a social

body, is in practice a small body of from fifty to a hundred persons who discuss, at a very high level of knowledge and independence, important questions of the day.

They exercise more influence by these debates than if they contented themselves with sending joint letters to The Times or combined to give evidence before a Royal Commission of enquiry or a Special Committee of the House of Commons.

### SUMMARY

*Unlike the United States, Britain has no iron-clad document forming the basis for law and government. The British Constitution, like the*

*ARMY TALKS was established by order of the Commanding General as an instrument to instill in all military personnel the following :—*

- (a) Confidence in the command.*
- (b) Pride in service and a sense of personal participation.*
- (c) Knowledge of the causes and progress of the war.*
- (d) A better understanding of our allies.*
- (e) An interest in current events and their relation to the war and the establishment of the peace.*



*American, is founded on the Magna Carta, but consists of practice, custom and political good manners rather than a formal document which can be referred to by chapter and paragraph. British governing agencies retain obsolete forms but put them to modern uses (i.e., the House of Lords).*

*Q. What part of the American and British political systems is played by Law?*

*Q. Does the King have the same veto power as the President? Does he exercise it?*

*Q. Which body, the House of Lords or the House of Commons, has the more important function in the British Political System? Explain the differences.*

## **The House of Commons**

### **Holds Legislative Power**

To turn from the Lords to the Commons is to turn from shadow to substance, from appearance to reality, and for that reason it is impossible to describe the role of the House of Commons without plunging at once into politics, into elections and parties, public opinion and pressure groups. The House of Commons cannot be studied or understood in isolation from the English people.

Thus it is true to say that in practice all legislative power is in the hands of a majority of the House of Commons and all executive power is in the hands of a committee whose sole claim to

authority is the continuing consent of the House of Commons. Powers that in the United States are divided among the President, the Senate, the House of Representatives, the Supreme Court, and the States and that cannot, in any circumstances, be united in one person or group, are in the English system united in the House of Commons and the Cabinet.

But to think of this unified power as being a 'grant from the majority of the House of Commons to the Cabinet is to be too simple. For the House of Commons itself is only passing on a grant of authority that it has received from the electors.

## **The House of Commons**

### **Holds Power of Repeal**

"We, the People . . .": It is logical, therefore, to begin with the equivalent of "We, the people of the United States" of the American Constitution. The British people, unlike the American people, has not created any divided and elaborate machinery for the expression of its will. Each new House of Commons is fully sovereign to do anything it likes and to undo anything its predecessors have done.

Thus it would be *legal* for a House of Commons to repeal the Statute of Westminster of 1931 and to repeal earlier statutes like the British North America Act of 1867 or the Irish Constitution of 1922. It would be legal but unthinkable.

It is only complete power over themselves, and over the more backward parts of the Empire that the electors give to Parliament. The electors are all men and women over 21, resident in Great Britain and British subjects. There is no poll-tax, and registration

is done for the voter; he or she need not trouble to register.

### British System is Simple

The duty of the elector is simplified in another way; he has only to cast one ballot at a time. Local elections, for city or county councils, are never held on the same day as parliamentary elections, and seldom in the same year. The parliamentary voter has only to choose between two or three candidates for one job, that of being a Member of Parliament. But that job has two aspects.

First of all, the Member has to represent his constituency like a Congressman. But he has also to act like a Presidential elector, to help to choose a Prime Minister. In fact, just as the American voter knows that by voting for Mr. X as presidential elector he is in fact voting to make Mr. Y President of the United States, the British voter knows that by voting for Mr. X who belongs to Mr. Y's party, he is ensuring that Mr. Y will, if his party wins, be Prime Minister and that a number of other leaders of that party will be "the Government," that is the Cabinet.

### No "Locality Rule" in England

Because he has this double function, the Member of Parliament cannot be simply a local representative and *need not be a local resident*. For the Prime Minister is always a Member of the House of Commons, and most of the Cabinet are too; a few are members of the House of Lords, a few may be political outsiders who must *at once* either get elected to the House of Commons or consent to pass into the dignified obscurity of the Lords.

The American "locality rule" which provides that a Senator must be a resident of the State which he represents

and a Representative a member of the District, is only possible of application because the executive government of the United States is not necessarily or often chosen from serving members of Congress.

### Stress Freedom of Electors

Since being a Member of Parliament is an indispensable qualification for being a member of the executive government in Britain, the elector must be free to elect from as wide a field as possible—not merely from the local field provided by local residents. To an American who thinks of democracy primarily in terms of equality, this seems undemocratic; to an Englishman who thinks primarily in terms of the free choice of the elector both of a policy and of men to carry it out, the American system seems less democratic, since it prevents the electors of, say, Winnamac exercising their free choice by electing a resident of Pelisipia.

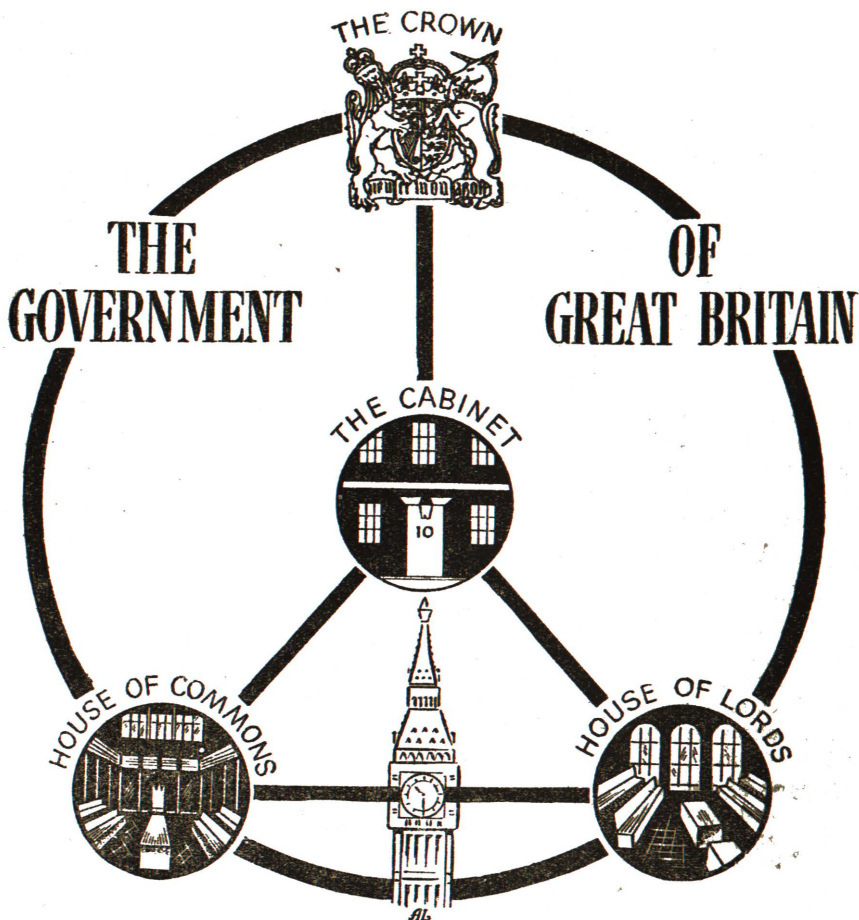
But there is another reason for the comparative indifference of the British voter to local patriotism. His local Member is not sent to Parliament to exercise an independent choice of policies. He is sent to support a given group of men or one man and a given policy. He is expected to be a rubber-stamp. That is his primary duty; to give, by his votes in Parliament, that continuous legal support to the Cabinet which will ensure that, at every moment, the Government has adequate power to carry out its policy.

### How Do the British

#### Change a Government?

How is a change of government brought about? In the older-fashioned textbooks, by a vote of the House of Commons overthrowing the Govern-





ment. In fact this hardly ever happens, for it would involve the revolt of the majority against its own leaders—and it was to support those leaders that the majority was elected.

The normal mechanism of a change of government is a general election. By the Parliament Act of 1911, the "life" of a Parliament is five years. But it is always open to the Government to dissolve Parliament, that is, the uncommon event of a revolt of the House of Commons to appeal to

the common sovereign, the people, against the majority of Parliament.

It is also open to a Government which is still supported by a majority of the House of Commons to dissolve Parliament, hoping for a renewal of its "mandate." There is nothing of the fixed calendar of American elections.

There have been general elections in 1918, 1922, 1923, 1924, 1929, 1931, 1935—and none since because Parliament passed a special Act prolonging its own life when war broke out. By-elections

caused by the death or resignation of Members have affected about a third of the membership of the House of Commons since 1935.

If the House of Commons seldom revolts and, when it does, if the decision is transferred to the mass of the voters, it might be plausible to say that the House of Commons was an elaborate and expensive way of doing a simple job. But the House of Commons, though not an independent governing body, is, nevertheless, very important. By public questions to Ministers and by private interviews, Members of Parliament can bring pressure to bear on Executive Departments.

### **Important Departments are Represented in Commons**

Every important Department is represented in the Commons, usually by its head, and everything it does is open to critical questioning and, if the questioner can get sufficient support from other members, to debate. This is a real check on bureaucratic excesses and omissions.

Instead of the system of Congressional Committees dealing with one subject or group of subjects, there is a direct power of interrogation of the responsible official head. And that responsible head knows that the Member who is harassing him is normally doing so because voters feel angry or curious and, if enough Members badger him, it means that a lot of voters feel that way—and general elections are lost and Governments turned out of office when enough voters are annoyed.

### **The Voter is Always Right**

Again, behind the Member and before the Minister is the spectre of the sovereign voter, the customer who is always right. The House of Commons is a permanent and personal

reporter of public opinion—as far as it affects the voters. Just as a Congressman has got to be a good judge of what they are really sore at in his home county, so a Member of Parliament has to be a good judge of what they are saying and thinking in his constituency.

### **The House—a Testing-ground For Future Cabinet Members**

But the House of Commons fulfils another function. It is a continual trial ground for would-be Cabinet Ministers. To be a successful Minister, a politician may have this quality or that, but one quality he must have, he must, somehow or other, impress on the House of Commons that he has what it takes.

The House may—and does—overestimate speech-making ability, or parliamentary skill, but it does not go solely by that. It knows that every Government must have members with courage and administrative ability as well as parliamentary ability—and that the Prime Minister must be one of them.

It is by being the successful head of his party in the House of Commons that a politician becomes the inevitable Prime Minister when his party wins a general election. If a Prime Minister retires or dies during the life of a Parliament, there may be some little doubt as to the successor.

### **No Officer like Vice-President**

There is no officer like the Vice-President with a right to the succession. It is only in these circumstances that the King has any power of choice.

When the King asks a politician to "form a government," he is sanctioning the transfer of his legal powers from one politician to another, and the transfer is usually made necessary by the fact that the retiring Prime Minister



# THE DECLARATION of INDEPENDENCE

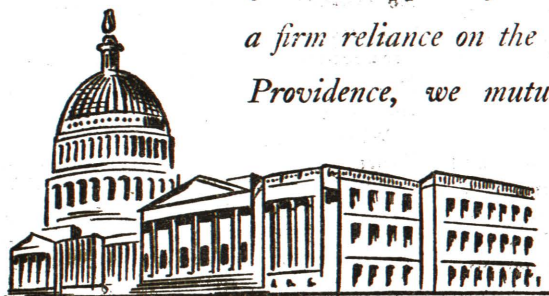
1776

*"We hold these truths to be self-evident—that all men are created equal; that they are endowed by their Creator with certain inalienable rights;*

*"That among these are life, liberty, and the pursuit of happiness. . . .*

*"We, therefore, the representatives of the United States of America in general Congress assembled, do, in the name and by the authority of the good people of these colonies, solemnly publish and declare that these united colonies are, and of right ought to be, free and independent States: . . . .*

*"And for the support of this Declaration, with a firm reliance on the protection of Divine Providence, we mutually pledge to each other our lives, our fortunes, and our sacred honor."*



has "lost ~~the~~ confidence of the House of Commons" which, again, usually means that he has lost a general election. The King merely ratifies the people's choice.

Only once in modern times has the King had a real choice. In 1923, the sudden fatal illness of Mr. Bonar Law made it necessary to choose between Lord Curzon and Mr. Baldwin. King George V chose Mr. Baldwin.

The Powers of the King: This is not to say that the King performs no important functions. First of all, he does for Britain and the British Commonwealth what the Constitution and such institutions as the Supreme Court do for the American people, he provides a center of emotional reverence.

Secondly, the King normally holds office for life, and like any other permanent official he has considerable opportunities of influencing successive Prime Ministers if the suggestions he makes are, in fact, the fruit of mature reflection on a long experience. But it is purely a matter of influence and not of power.

### "Influence is Not Government"

"Influence is not government," said George Washington, and the successors of George Washington in the White House are not to be compared for a moment with the successors of George III. The power of the President of the United States has grown about as steadily as the power of the King of England has declined.

### SUMMARY

*The House of Commons holds powers which in the United States are divided among the President, the Senate, the House of Representatives and the Supreme Court. Elections in Great Britain are simpler*

*than in the United States. Members of Parliament need not live in their districts. Parliament normally is elected for five years, but a General Election may be called at any time by "the Government"—what, in the United States, we would call "the Administration." Most British political leaders come from the House of Commons and the Prime Minister is always a member.*

*Q. What is an outstanding difference between the qualifications of a Congressman and those of a Member of Parliament?*

*Q. How is a change of Government (administration) brought about?*

*Q. What is the British equivalent of the American Congressional investigating committee?*

### Party System Different

To make this picture of the British parliamentary system simple it has been necessary to ignore one indispensable part of it, the party system. It is already evident that the British system is a very different way of ensuring democratic government from the American. It is more concerned with getting a few decisive answers to a few artificially simple questions than with so distributing power that no one region, group or class will have overwhelming authority.

But both systems depend for their actual working on a two-party system. Any two-party system in any country has to be artificial to produce the necessary simplicity.

The American problem is to secure that an adequate majority of the American people will vote for one man for President. The British system aims at making it easy for the British people



to vote for around 350 men, a majority of the House of Commons.

## No Primary Elections

### Under British System

Under this British form of government candidates who profess to represent a party must accept the party leadership in advance. This means that the headquarters of the party in London must have a voice in the selection of candidates, even if it only takes the form of strong recommendation of X and vigorous criticism of Y. But the final choice is made by local associations which represent only the active, due-paying party members, often, especially in "safe" Conservative districts, a small body indeed.

*There are no primaries, direct or indirect.*

If the average Member were expected to exercise an independent role, this system would not work at all. But the majority of Members are not expected, even by themselves, ever to play a direct part in the framing of policy or the carrying out of administration.

The seats that are always won by the Conservative or Labor parties tend to be given to safe persons whose chief claim, in the case of Conservative seats, is that they can pay their own expenses and, in the case of Labor seats, that they have, as trade union officials, served long and well. It is a general complaint that the House of Commons, in modern times, gives less opportunity to bright young men than it has ever done before. But it still gives the new member, including the new young member, opportunities to use his abilities.

## British Form Has Weakness

The present Prime Minister became a member of the Cabinet in 1908 within eight years of entering Parlia-

ment and he has thus had longer experience of actual government than would have been possible in the American system. But it is in the absence of any general effective system of ensuring that the candidates chosen by the parties represent any sizeable section of the voters that the greatest weakness of the British political system lies—from the democratic point of view.

It is not very effective democracy to have to choose between two candidates neither of whom appeals to you in the least. This would not matter a great deal if the parties themselves were totally satisfactory instruments of the people's will. They are not, because they cannot be. A two-party system, or a three-party system, simplifies all issues too much; it ignores shades of difference and ignores the fact that a voter may want items one and three from one program and items two and four from the rival program. But this is as true of America as of Britain.

Where the party systems differ is in the greater uniformity of opinion *inside* the British parties. American parties are basically more regional and historical. In Georgia nearly all the voters are Democrats and in Vermont nearly all the voters are Republicans; conflicts of interest, social and economic differences are represented by factions *inside* the dominant party, not by contests between two or more parties.

## British Parties Show

### Economics of Regions

In Britain, this is not so. Some regions, Scotland, Wales, Cornwall, "the Celtic fringe," are traditionally more to the Left than England is, but, on the whole, poor districts vote Labor, no matter where they are located, and wealthy districts uniformly vote Conservative no matter where they

are located. In general, this party strength is reflected in city and county elections.

City and county government, in Britain, matters much less in national politics than it does in the United States. Although there has been an overwhelming Conservative majority in the House of Commons since 1931, for nearly all that period the two largest cities, London and Glasgow, have had Labor administrations.

### SUMMARY

*The realities of the British political system are easily stated. A Cabinet exercising a combined legislative and executive power, unlimited by States Rights or judicial review by the Courts, holds office as long as it commands a majority in the House of Commons. And that, normally, means as long as the electors, men and women, vote its ticket.*

*A rough, though not entirely accurate comparison with the American system may be made by saying that the Cabinet has powers similar to the legislative power of Congress and the executive authority of the President, combined, but without a Supreme Court to rule on the constitutionality of any action it may take.*

*An official publication of the United States War Department makes this comment on the British political system :*

*"Within this apparently old-fashioned framework, the British enjoy a practical working twentieth century democracy which is, in some ways, even more flexible and sensi-*

*tive to the will of the people than our own."*

*The rights of minorities are safeguarded by custom, not by law—and custom is affected by the fact that the minority will, sooner or later, be the majority—and an excessive use of temporary power by the majority will be rebuked by the voters, not by the Courts.*

But this unified and reasonably direct system of government has an ornamental exterior, robes and ceremonies, recalling the days of a feudal monarchy when the legal language was French, when the King of England ruled in Bordeaux but not in Scotland or Ulster, when America was still undiscovered and India, Africa and the Orient were the fabled realms of Marco Polo and Prester John.

### "Lloyd's" Does the Same Thing

Why should this highly integrated government work through old and obsolete formulas? Partly, because England is a country which likes conservative appearances, which can be illustrated from another old and famous English institution, the great alliance of insurance brokers called "Lloyd's." The contracts made there are, in form, what they were 250 years ago. But each contract has a schedule that deals with the current insurance business. Lloyd's has always opposed modernizing the formal contract because it would at once begin to be out of date in this rapidly changing world.

A totally obsolete form, an extremely up to date interpretation of the form, that is the method of Lloyd's and of the House of Commons. To use ancient forms for very modern purposes, is, so the English believe, real political efficiency.





# Preparation

**O**NE of the best ways to know and really to understand our own Government and how our political system works is to compare them with the Governments and political systems of other countries. We have a very good opportunity for this comparison while we are in England. For several reasons we should be doing just this. In the first place, our form of Government and political life has much in common with that of England and the British Commonwealth. We have borrowed and adopted more from England than from any other country. In the second place, we are here where we can observe day by day the workings of the British system. We can note how very much it appears to differ from ours in form, and how very much it is like ours in the way it works. Or, is it?

**B**UT there is a much more important reason why we should know as much as possible about and try to understand the British Political System and how it works. This reason is the necessity that Britain and America understand each other and work together in the years ahead, if there is to be a lasting peace. Yes, we must know and understand China and Russia, too, as well as Latin America and the countries of Europe. But if America and the British Commonwealth of Nations can see that our "bread is buttered on the same side," the first big step will be taken toward "What We Are Fighting For." Related to this very important reason for knowing and understanding our British Allies is the basic problem of knowing and understanding ourselves. What is the American Way of Life? What is it that causes us to cross the seven seas to join hands with the United Nations in fighting the Axis Powers until "Unconditional Surrender"? If we had the answer to this question we should have the answer to many others that we are asking ourselves these days.

**T**HE best soldier is a soldier who knows what he is fighting for, and loves that which he knows. Confidence in command, pride in service, and a deep sense of personal participation and responsibility for the successful conclusion of this war are necessary for victory over the enemy. The German soldier has these qualities. The Tommy and the Yank have these qualities, too, and with much better reasons. Let's look at the reasons why the British soldier in the Eighth Army believes that his Government and political system is worth more than life itself.



# QUESTIONS FOR THE DISCUSSION

Begin the session with a few questions such as these :

- a. **What are the essential differences between the British democratic form of government and the American ?**
- b. **What are the similarities ?**
- c. **What does the American Government owe to the British in its Constitution and development ?**

### OUTLINE OF THE HISTORY OF THE BRITISH GOVERNMENT

- a. **What advantages would there be in England's retaining traditions whose origins and usefulness have been outgrown or outmoded ? (p. 4).**
- b. **Does the King of England still rule ? Has he power ? Influence ? Prestige ? Is he still popular ? If so, how can this be accounted for ? (p. 6)**
- c. **What is the meaning of the Royal Veto ? The Royal Assent ? (pp. 5-6)**

### THE FUNCTIONS OF THE HOUSE OF LORDS AND THE HOUSE OF COMMONS

- a. **What are the powers of the House of Lords, and how do they use them ? What constitutes membership of the House of Lords ? (pp. 6-8)**
- b. **How are the members of the Commons elected ?**
- c. **How does the election system work ? (When making a comparison with our own, let us remember that Texas is three times the size of England, and that a Parliamentary election in England might be compared with one in one of our own States.)**

### THE PARLIAMENTARY SYSTEM

- a. **What are the main differences between a parliamentary election and a congressional election ?**
- b. **What power does the House of Commons exercise ? (pp. 12-13)**
- c. **How are the Cabinet ministers tried out ? And what qualifications must they fulfil ? (p. 12)**
- d. **How does a new Prime Minister achieve office ? What part does the King play in the choice ? (pp. 10-11)**

The following titles are suggested for the use of Discussion Leaders :

**A History of England** .. .. G. M. Trevelyan.

**The British Government** .. .. G. M. Young (Britain in Picture Series).

**The Spirit of English History** .. .. A. L. Rowse.

**Roberts' Rules of Order** .. .. (revised).

This is a particularly good topic on which to invite a British officer or civilian to give a talk, to be followed by a discussion period as a continuation of your informal discussion with the men. Again your attention is directed to the resources made available to us through the 23 Regional Committee Secretaries of the Central Advisory Council for Adult Education in H.M. Forces, whose names, addresses, and telephone numbers were listed in the issue of ARMY TALKS for 15 December, 1943.

It is urgently recommended that discussion leaders make constant reference to Vol. 1, No. 1, of ARMY TALKS, the "Handbook for Discussion Leaders." Requests for additional copies of future issues of ARMY TALKS should be made to the Station Special Service Officer.

## CIRCULATING LIBRARIES AVAILABLE TO U.S. TROOPS

**T**HE American soldier who wishes to extend his opportunities for reading good books should know that there are four main circulating libraries based in London, and a fifth in Edinburgh, all of which circulate the latest books on the following bases :

1. Prepaid subscriptions may be made for three or more months, which entitle the borrower to one or more books at a time.
2. Facilities are provided for the changing of books as often as required.
3. Books can be chosen from the library shelves or book lists can be sent on request.
4. There are different grades of subscription rates for newer or older publications.
5. Some libraries offer special terms for group subscriptions.

### Following is a list of the circulating libraries :

Boots Booklovers' Library (Branches throughout the country at Boots Cash Chemists.)

Harrod's Library, Knightsbridge, London, S.W.1.

W. H. Smith & Son, Ltd. (Branches throughout the country.)

The Times Book Club, 42 Wigmore Street, London, W.1.

Douglas & Foulis, 9 Castle Street, Edinburgh.

---

The next issue of **ARMY TALKS**, entitled "Two Years of War," will consist of abstracts from the report of Gen. George C. Marshall, Chief of Staff, to the Secretary of War covering the period from July 1st, 1941, to June 30th, 1943.



