The British Political Tradition

The Political System of the United Kingdom
Current Events
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- **BBC Headlines UK**
  - Tories pledge law to curb tax rises
  - UK aid donations to Nepal reach 15m
  - Janner complainants to seek review
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- Daily Mail (Top Headlines)
  - Monty Python Cameraman arrested
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- Guardian Headlines UK
  - Madeleine McCann: Parents win libel damages
  - Nigel Farage: EU response to migrant boat crisis would bring jihadis to UK
  - Economic growth halves ahead of election
Revision: three models of UK politics

1. The Westminster Model
2. The Differentiated Polity Model
3. The Asymmetric Power Model
Last week’s class questions

1. How is the UK different from/similar to Germany and France? Please consider various dimensions
2. Why and how is the Westminster model not an adequate description of the modern British state?
3. How have pre-modern elements affected the nature of the British state?
Outline

Intro
Ideas and Ideologies
   Ideologies in British Politics
      Liberalism, Conservatism, Socialism
Decline
   Political Decline
   Economic Stagnation and Decline
Summary & Class Questions
Today: Tradition

- Major institutions in place for many centuries, hardly changed after 1918
- Glorious revolution: limited government, constitutional monarchy
- Many problems solved by Irish secession
- After 1688/1745 hardly any (violent) conflict (outside Ireland) about
  - Form of government/constitution
  - The Nation
  - Distribution of resources
  - Ideology (cf France, Germany, Italy)
- “Postwar consensus”
- Ended by Thatcherism?
# British Governments from 1940

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>from-to</th>
<th>PM(s)</th>
<th>parties</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>40-45</td>
<td>Churchill</td>
<td>Coalition</td>
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<tr>
<td>45-51</td>
<td>Attlee</td>
<td>Labour</td>
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<tr>
<td>51-64</td>
<td>Churchill, Eden, Macmillan, Douglas-Home</td>
<td>Conservative</td>
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<tr>
<td>64-70</td>
<td>Wilson</td>
<td>Labour</td>
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<tr>
<td>70-74</td>
<td>Heath</td>
<td>Conservative</td>
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<tr>
<td>74-79</td>
<td>Wilson, Callaghan</td>
<td>Labour</td>
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<tr>
<td>79-97</td>
<td>Thatcher, Major</td>
<td>Conservative</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>97-10</td>
<td>Blair, Brown</td>
<td>Labour</td>
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<tr>
<td>10-14</td>
<td>Cameron (Clegg)</td>
<td>Conservative/Liberal Democrats</td>
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What are ideologies?

- Consistent system of political ideas and perceptions → political action
- “Closed”
- Going back to the French revolution
- Major ideologies developed during 19th century:
  - Liberalism
  - Nationalism
  - Conservatism
  - Socialism
Ideologies in British Politics

- Notoriously unpopular (pragmatism)
- But: salient left-right dimension brings together various (super)-issues
  - The state vs the market
  - collectivism vs Individualism
  - Equality of outcomes vs merit
  - Progressive vs minimal taxation
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  - War coalition and major post-war decisions (creation of NHS)
  - Not reversed by Conservatives 51-64
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- Radicalisation during 1970s
- Labour: “Third Way” from 1990s
- Cameron: “Compassionate Conservatism” (initially)
What is Liberalism?

- Ideology of a new class (merchants, professionals)
- John Locke (1632-1704), John Stuart Mill (1806-73)
- Basic human rights and freedoms more important than authority, society, the state
- Individuals must not harm others, no other limits on liberty
- Government exists to guarantee liberty
- Free markets promote individual freedom and economic growth
- Dominant ideology of the 19th century
- Turn in the late 19th century: liberty requires (some) economic security → progressive taxation, more active government
What is Conservatism?

- A reaction against the (French) Revolution
- Edmund Burke (1729-97)
- Conservatives suspicious of (coherent) ideology and sceptical of all great schemes
- Emphasis on tradition, moderation, authority
- Organic view of society (vs. individualism)
- Paternalistic view of government, not necessarily in favour of markets and modernisation
- *Not* Christian Democracy
What is Socialism?

- A reaction to (early) industrialisation
- Improve the lot of the working (and lower middle) classes
- Public or worker ownership of means of production
- Individual rights but limited economic freedom
- Four important strands in the UK
  - Trade Unionism (bargaining)
  - Fabianism (reform, pragmatism)
  - Non-Marxist Socialism (gradual transformation of capitalism)
  - Marxism
What is Thatcherism?

- Thatcher radicalised Conservatism
- Economic Liberalism:
  - Market Radicalism
  - Small government
  - Lower taxes, privatisation, Monetarism instead of Keynesianism
  - Benefit cuts
  - New Public management, against trade unions
- Plus authoritarian elements
  - Nationalism
  - Moral Conservatism
- (Electorally) successful at the time, but made Conservative brand “toxic”
- Parallel radicalisation of Labour (not successful)
- http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=izjs0UV12fo
Thatcherism...

1. A break with the past?
2. A resolution of the 1970s crisis?
   - Both points controversial (in academic circles)
The End of Ideology and the Third Way?

- “New Labour” moved to the centre
- (Largely symbolic) modification of Clause IV (nationalisation)
- Accepted many premises of Thatcherism
  - Market mechanisms, incentives
  - Lower taxes
  - Public-Private partnerships
  - Pro-business
  - “Tough on crime”
  - Sceptical of benefits

The Political System of the United Kingdom
Political Tradition (15/23)
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- Yet retained social-democratic values: equality, diversity
- Just another standoff between Labour’s left & right wing?
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Just another standoff between Labour’s left & right wing?
Cameron’s “modern compassionate Conservatism”
  Detoxifying the conservative brand by moving to the centre
  “Notting Hill Set” isolated
The Role of Ideology?

- Ideology less prominent than in the 1970s/80s
- Emphasis on results, not principles
- Yet ideological (=fundamental?) issues relevant:
  - Privatisation/re-nationalisation of public services
  - Afghanistan/Iraq
  - Europe, Immigration
  - Workers vs. capital owners
- Political ideas still relevant
From Empire to EU

“Britain won the war, lost the peace”
From Empire to EU

- “Britain won the war, lost the peace”
- Relatively smooth process of decolonisation reduced former centre of Empire to middle-sized European power
- No longer a world power (Suez 1954)
- But also not involved in European Integration (unlike France) – a late-comer and trouble-maker
- “Special Relations” with US and Commonwealth
- Economic decline, pound crisis
  - 1976: 2.3 billion rescue loan from IMF
  - 1992: Exit from ERM (“Black Wednesday”)
The economic crisis of the 1970s

Source: OECD, Economic Outlook, various years.
Absolute and Relative Decline

- Absolute decline: permanent fall below previously attained levels (i.e. shrinking GDP)
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  - Can (and does) co-exist with absolute growth
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- Economic facts and political interpretation
Is/was there economic decline?

- GDP/capita (EU-15):
  Britain 3rd in 1960, 9/10/11th in 1970/80/90, back to 4th in 2002, currently 6th
- Recovery in 1990s not uniform, largely due to the role of London (financial services)
- Some areas amongst the poorest in Western Europe
- Industrial centres of the north all but wiped out
- Low productivity
Is/was there economic decline?

The chart shows the levels of productivity (current prices) for various countries, with the UK set at 100. For the year 2013, the US produced 31% more output relative to the UK.

Is/was there economic decline?

- Recovery in 1990s not uniform, largely due to the role of London (financial services)
- Some areas amongst the poorest in Western Europe
- Industrial centres of the north all but wiped out
- Low productivity
- Horrendous infrastructure, investment backlog
- Hit hard by the financial crisis (but bounced back)
Decline: why?

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Argument</th>
<th>Cause</th>
<th>Remedies</th>
</tr>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Culture</td>
<td>Anti-enterprise culture, elitist education</td>
<td>Change of attitudes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Empire</td>
<td>Empire as cushion, imperial overstretch</td>
<td>Adaptation to changed status</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Industry</td>
<td>Poor management, unions</td>
<td>New management techniques and culture, reduce power of unions</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Finance</td>
<td>The City’s short-termism</td>
<td>Longer-term investments</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Institutions</td>
<td>Overload</td>
<td>State as a solution/problem?</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
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Source: adapted from Kavanagh et al. p. 128

http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=zL_m5Czneno
Summary

- Britain spiritual home of classic ideologies
- Most of the time, slow and gradual development of the state
- Ideologies as such currently unpopular, but
  - Enormously important during 1970s-80s
  - Big conflicts/questions persist
- One of these: How to explain/manage/reverse *decline*
- Next week: The (changing) constitutional framework
Class questions

- Why did the Third Way appeal to many Labour leaders in the 1990s?
- Which explanation for Britain’s relative decline to you find most useful/convincing?
- (Liberalism has been more successful as a set of ideas than in helping a party to win votes – discuss)