

UNITED KINGDOM

Date of Elections: October 10, 1974

Purpose of Elections

Elections were held for all the members of the House of Commons, whose term of office came prematurely to an end when Parliament was dissolved on September 20, 1974. Previous general elections had been held only slightly more than 7 months before, on February 28, 1974.

Characteristics of Parliament

The bicameral Parliament of the United Kingdom consists of the House of Commons and the House of Lords.

The House of Commons consists of 635 members elected for 5 years. Of these 635 seats, 516 are set aside for England, 71 for Scotland, 36 for Wales and 12 for Northern Ireland.

The House of Lords is indeterminate in size. There were recently some 1,075 potential members, of whom over 275 were debarred from taking part in the proceedings of the House either because they were not in receipt of a writ of summons or because they were on leave of absence. This membership comprises over 800 hereditary peers and peeresses sitting by virtue of creation or descent, other than those who have disclaimed their titles for life under the provisions of the Peerage Act, 1963; life peers being (a) 16 Lords of Appeal (active and retired) under the Appellate Jurisdiction Act, 1876, as amended, and (b) approximately 215 life peers and peeresses under the Life Peerages Act, 1958; 2 archbishops and 24 bishops (as long as they hold their sees). About 250 Lords attend their House's sessions with any regularity.

Electoral System

All British subjects and citizens of the Republic of Ireland, of either sex, are entitled to vote provided they have reached the age of 18 on polling day and are resident in a constituency on the "qualifying date" (October 10 of each year) *. Prisoners and the insane cannot vote, while persons convicted for electoral offences may not do so for period of 5 years.

* For a parliamentary election in any constituency in Northern Ireland, the elector must have been resident in Northern Ireland for 3 months prior to the qualifying date.

Electoral registers are drawn up on the constituency level and revised annually in October. Voting is not compulsory. Proxy voting is permitted for members of the armed forces, Crown servants and British Council staff employed overseas, persons who are outside the country on polling day because of their employment, and the husbands or wives of any of the people in the above categories. Postal voting is allowed those people who, although in the United Kingdom, are prevented from voting in person in their constituency because of, *inter alia*, physical disability, religious observance, or inability to reach the polling station without an air or sea journey.

Candidates for the House of Commons must be British subjects at least 21 years of age. The insane and undischarged bankrupts are disqualified for membership in the House, as are members of the armed forces, policemen, civil servants, holders of certain judicial offices, clergymen (except of Non-conformist churches), peers and members of a large number of public boards and tribunals.

A nomination must be supported by 10 electors and accompanied by a deposit of £150, which sum is returned to the candidate if he obtains at least 1/8 of the total votes.

Each candidate may spend US\$1875 in campaign expenses, plus 12% cents for every 6 or 8 voters, depending on whether county or borough constituency.

For purposes of elections for the House of Commons, the United Kingdom is divided into 635 constituencies, each of which elects one member on the basis of simple majority vote.

By-elections are held to fill Commons seats which become vacant between general elections. In the House of Lords, Bishops' places are filled by the next senior diocesan bishop and seats of Lords in Appeal are filled by appointment.

General Political Considerations and Conduct of the Elections

On September 18, 1974, Prime Minister Harold Wilson announced that Parliament would be dissolved two days later and that a general election would be held on October 10. This marked the first time in over 60 years that two general elections (February and October 1974) had been scheduled in the same calendar year.

Prior to this announcement, the country's three major political parties — Labour, Conservative and Liberal — had issued their election campaign manifestos. The platform of the ruling Labour Party — which had formed a minority Government after the February elections — placed its strongest

emphasis on a voluntary "social contract" with the trade unions, under which labour would moderate its wage demands while the Government implemented economic and social reforms. The manifesto also promised a binding referendum within 12 months of the election on Britain's continued membership in the European Economic Community and reaffirmed the Labour Government's nationalization programme.

The Conservative Party proposed a comprehensive price stabilization programme to combat the country's high inflation and promised close co-operation with the unions, stating that it would seek a voluntary agreement with the unions on wage restraint but would be prepared to reintroduce mandatory controls if this failed. The Liberal Party stressed the nation's need for a mandatory wage and price control programme, pledged legislation to give workers a share in industrial decisions, and ruled out further nationalization except to aid failing companies vital to the national interest.

While Labour rejected the idea of a coalition Government, were no single party to gain a parliamentary majority, both Conservatives and Liberals were open to such an arrangement especially in view of the country's economic difficulties.

By September 30 — the last day for nominations — a record 2255 candidates had presented themselves for the 635 Commons seats; these included 150 women and 102 more Liberal candidates than in February.

On polling day, Labour obtained fewer total votes than earlier in the year but nevertheless increased its number of seats to 319 — just one over the total needed for an absolute Commons majority.

Prime Minister Wilson announced his new Cabinet on October 18.

Statistics

1. *Results of the Elections and Distribution of Seats in the House of Commons*

Number of registered voters.	40,081,286
Voters.	29,174,440 (72.8 %)

Political Group	Number of Candidates	Votes obtained	%	Number of Seats in the House of Commons	Number of Seats held at Dissolution	Number of Seats won in February 1974 Elections
Labour Party.	626	11,458,704	39.3	319	298	301
Conservative Party.	623	10,458,548	35.8	276	296	296
Liberal Party.	619	5,348,193	18.3	13	15	14
Scottish Nationalist Party.	71	839,628	2.8	11	7	7
United Ulster Unionist Coalition (UUUC).	12	407,778	1.4	10	11	11
<i>Plaid Cymru</i>	36	166,321	.6	3	2	2
Social Democratic and Labour Party	9	154,193	.5	1	1	1
Others*.	259	341,075	1.2	2	3	3
				635	633	635

* Including the Speaker, who is a Conservative.

** There were 2 vacancies at the time of dissolution.

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

Teachers, lecturers.	92
Barristers.	84
Company directors.	80
Managers, executives and administrators	52
Journalists.	51
Other businessmen.	50
Engineers.	33
Farmers, landowners.	26
Solicitors.	24
Trade union officials.	19
Clerical and technical employees.	18
Mineworkers.	17
Underwriters and brokers.	17
Accountants.	13
Physicians.	9
Party officials.	7
Rail workers.	4
Publishers.	4
Others.	<u>11</u>

611*

* Figure available.

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

Men.	608
Women.	27
	635

*4. Distribution of Members of the House of Commons
according to Age Group*

30 years and under.	14
31-35.	52
36-40.	75
41-45.	126
46-50.	118
51-55.	92
56-60.	76
61-65.	51
66-70.	25
Over 70.	6
	645