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Civilisation britannique

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① This text is an article^{*} extracted from a newspaper called "The Guardian", which is a left-of-center one; as a matter of consequence, it tends to support the Labour Party and could be in favor of changes in Great Britain's constitutional monarchy system. The article was written in July 2003; at this time, Tony Blair, member of the Labour Party was Prime Minister. Indeed, he was elected in 1997 and remained Prime Minister for ten years. As a "PM", he acted in favor of a diminishment of the powers of the "dignified part of the constitution", that is to say the House of Lords and the Queen. Believing that some habits of such institutions were old-fashioned and rather undemocratic, he decided to reform a few things within it, such as the hereditary tradition of the former and a clearer view upon the finances of the latter by the British people.

Thus, the article was written in this political context of questioning the role of the monarchy. The columnist deals with everything that needs to be changed according to him - and more precisely according to the Labour^s, since

he uses the pronoun "we" at the end of the text. In his view, the monarchy tends to be a little archaic and thus needs some improvements because today's system is both harmful to the people, the political background of Great Britain and the monarch. Thus, Oliver Dowd, makes some proposals in order to improve an institution that most of British people approve.

Intro. in pentrap logue

② The facts

a) The Queen's Prerogative Powers are all the abilities that the Queen theoretically owns. Thus, she is supposed to be the Head of State, head of the Army and Head of the Church of England. She can appoint Ministers (even the Prime Minister), even though she always follows the political "stream" of the moment; she can declare war and also has legislative prerogatives, as no bill voted by the Parliament can become Acts without the Royal Assent. Elizabeth II is, in theory, the main figure of the executive power in Great Britain; nevertheless, all these prerogatives are not actually efficient.

b) In 1701, an Act claiming that the monarch had to belong to the Church of England was voted and thus became part of the Constitution of Great Britain. It also implies that the monarch cannot marry someone who does not have the same religion than his or her own, (in particular a Catholic). Such an Act is a consequence of the religious wars that took place during the midseventeenth century.

c) "Devolution" is a process which started in the twentieth century, more particularly in 1999, which made a "Scottish Parliament" and an "Irish devol" possible. Indeed, in 1707, Scotland and Wales (and then Ireland in 1801) signed the Acts of Union with England, which means that they became part of a wider institution called Great Britain and gave up their own political system to be governed by British institutions. Nevertheless, the process of devolution allowed these countries to have their own Parliaments and to have "devolved" powers (such as law, education or environment) and at the same time staying governed by British institutions in every other matter, called "reserved powers".

d) When neither of the main political parties (which are three: the Labour, the Conservatives and the Lib-Dems) can obtain an absolute majority of the votes after an election, then a clear majority cannot really be seen; such a situation is called a "hung parliament". Indeed, the political situation could remain blocked, because the policies of each party are really different and also because the role of the opposition is important; it would be difficult to satisfy a large majority of the people and also to form a stable government. In such cases, the monarch owns the power to choose the winning party, which questions his or her neutrality.

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③ The Issues

a) This statement deals with political accountability of the ministers. Indeed, in a democratic system, the representatives of the executive power cannot do anything they

want, because it could go against the interest of the people. This is the reason why they have to be accountable to another institution, that is to say another constitutional element which would have power on them and stop them in case of abuses. According to the journalist who wrote the article, the problem with Great Britain's political system is that the executive branch of the constitution is too strong because the Parliament "barely" cannot do anything against them. Moreover, ~~as~~ the monarch officially owns the executive prerogatives whereas the ministers actually use them, it is both unfair to the Queen and the people according to him, given that ministers are not really "watched" by anyone and could hide behind the Monarch.

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b) According to the journalist, ^{the} British monarchy is ~~old-fashioned~~. Yet, he absolutely does not ~~propose~~ an abolition of this institution, but believes that it ought to be improved and modernized, and makes few proposals in this way. Indeed, even though the monarchy tends to have a good reputation in Great Britain (as four in five British people are in favor of it), some of its tradition could be considered discriminatory, undemocratic and "out of touch" to the people. For example, it does not seem normal that "male primogeniture", which gives the priority to the male heir of the throne, still functions in a country where the rights of the women are really advanced in comparison to other places. The columnist thinks that, as it constitutes a pillar of the country, the monarchy should give the example and follow the path of modernity. It now needs to adapt if it wants to remain popular.

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Group 5

④ The Journalist's opinion

Except from Tony Blair's reforms of the monarchy in the 1990s, which forced the Queen to pay taxes on income and to be clearer about the organization of her finances, there were no real changes in the monarchy's organization, so that it remains a quite old-fashioned institution, even now in 2012. The article deals with the ideas that could be applied in order to improve it, which are still relevant today. Indeed, even though the journalist asserts that his proposals are really easy to "implement", narrow-mindedness and "partisanship" (last line) made them unapplied.

His proposals could be divided into two branches: the ones that are in favor of an improvement in the interests of the people, and the others, which tend to make the position of the monarch himself or herself easier.

First, he asserts that the Queen's prerogative powers*, which she does not actually use, are not legitimate, and should be given to another and more adapted institution, so that both the people and the monarch's interests would be ensured. Indeed, giving such important powers to an unelected institution and make it take the responsibilities of it without being able to use it properly seems unfair on both sides. Moreover, it seems unfair and undemocratic that countries which have their own Parliaments should remain under the religious authority of which they don't recognize. In the interest of such people, the journalist implies that devolved countries should be able to be governed by a representative of their own Church or that the Queen should not be Head of the Church of England any more. Besides, the columnist wants to abolish "male

primogeniture, which makes a male heir be prior to a female one; according to him, it cannot be acceptable in a country which stands up for Human Rights and sex equality. It is indeed a contradictory and old-fashioned tradition, given that British women obtained the right to vote long ago, in 1928.

Eventually, the journalist believes that the old-fashioned side of the British monarchy could be harmful even for itself. Thus, he proposes to cancel the Act of 1701 which forces the monarch to marry a member of the Church of England and to be part of it himself.

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Modernizing the British monarchy consists, according to the journalist, to adapt to democratic principle and modern changes, by paying more attention to the interests of the people and making the monarch more human. Indeed, it is still a very popular institution and thus needs to be changed in order to keep its special place into the British' s hearts.

What about the newspaper's opinion?
Relevance of reforms in 2012?