

## CORRECTION DEVOIR DE CIVILISATION BRITANNIQUE L1

### 1. Introducing the text

Write an introduction to a commentary which contains all the usual elements (date, source, summary, etc).

The document under study is a press article entitled “Let’s be fair to the monarch – and fair to ourselves” which was published on July, 16<sup>th</sup> 2003 by *The Guardian*, a Lib-Dem quality newspaper. At the time Tony Blair, from the New Labour party, was Prime Minister. The present article deals with the issue of Royal Prerogative Powers, as a list of what they really are was published in 2003 to allow for greater transparency. The journalist claims that the monarchy should be modernized. Indeed, that institution is considered here as discriminatory but there is no call for its abolition, just some proposals for various amendments to the way it works.

### 2. The Facts

Answer the following questions by giving as detailed answers as possible.

#### **a. What are the Queen’s Prerogative Powers?**

They are the powers that are officially held by the Queen but which are in fact the actual prerogative of politicians. Those powers are part of common law and mean that the Queen (or ministers) can appoint or dismiss ministers, grant honours, open and dissolve parliament, declare war, sign treaties, grant pardon and other powers which are not subjected to Parliament scrutiny.

#### **b. When did it become constitutionally impossible for a British monarch to marry a Roman Catholic?**

The Act of Settlement in 1701 made sure that no British monarch would marry a Roman Catholic.

#### **c. What is the name of the process which made a “Scottish Parliament” and an “Irish dail” possible?**

Devolution was a decentralization process seen through in 1997 by Tony Blair. It gives greater power to the regions, namely Scotland and Ireland which started using their own parliaments for their “internal” affairs.

#### **d. What is a hung parliament?**

There is a hung parliament when no party gains a majority at the general election. That was what happened in 2010 and which resulted in a coalition government between the Conservative Party and the Lib-Dem party.

### 3. The Issues

Explain the following statements by writing a short paragraph for each.

- a. “ministers, who are often barely accountable to parliament”.

In a democracy, the system of checks and balances prevents any abuse from any powers, whether it is the executive, legislative or judicial power. What the journalist is saying is that since royal prerogative powers are held by the queen but used by ministers, it means that there is no check by either the House of Commons or the House of Lords. It seems unfair for the Queen because in the event of a real important choice to be made, she will be accountable although she will have had no say in the decision. That is how ministers – the executive power – can hide behind the monarch and avoid the legislative power’s scrutiny. The journalist’s analysis is that the prerogative powers should be renamed and also amended: “they should be removed from the monarch and placed where parliament thinks each power should best lie, whether with ministers or parliament itself or some other body.” (l.12-14)

- b. “the monarchy, which needs to be helped to adjust to changing times.”

Although Queen Elizabeth II is loved by most Britons, the institution is often considered as old-fashioned and anachronistic. Indeed the succession issue is quite telling as no female (at least in 2003) could access the throne, even if she was the eldest child. The throne would pass on to her brother. It is also the sign of lack of evolution that the Queen should be Head of the Church of England as it means that she does not represent people who have a different religion.

### 4. The Journalist’s opinion

Write a detailed paragraph on the author’s proposals. Pay attention to the source and the date of the document. Are those proposals still relevant in 2012?

The journalist proposed that royal prerogative powers should be named differently in order to reflect who actually holds those powers and free the Queen from any criticism in case of a deep political crisis. She also thinks that it is archaic to always choose a male heir over a female heir when the latter was first-born. Male primogeniture should then disappear in favor of simple primogeniture. The Act of Settlement passed in 1701 should also be repealed as it means that no Monarch can marry a Catholic, a fact which is a clear proof of discrimination. As far as religion is concerned it is also becoming difficult in a multi-cultural country to have the Head of the Church of England as head of state.

Those advocated reforms would not be dealt with in the same way in a 2012 article as male primogeniture was abolished as well as the requirement for the Monarch to marry anybody but a Catholic.